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DARING TO SPEAK THAT LOVE'S NAME:
a study of the novels of Jane Rule

by

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled DARING TO SPEAK THAT LOVE'S NAME: A Study of the Novels of Jane Rule submitted by MARLENE A. D. LYNNE VAN LUVEN in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Date October 13, 1981

ABSTRACT

Unlike many modern novelists who write about homosexual relationships, Jane Rule is no polemicist. She prefers to describe human relationships rather than to prescribe possible solutions for human dilemmas. Rule casts a critical eye on society and sees that many of the old institutions are floundering. Her fiction suggests alternatives to such institutions by depicting chosen rather than conventional or inherited connections between individuals. Consequently, much of Rule's work reflects a tension between the old conventions and new alternatives.

Some characters within Rule's fiction opt for relationships with members of their own sex, even though they are aware that such a choice does not reflect the mores of society. Rule uses the tactic of strong characterization, rather than didacticism, to win the reader's support for the homosexual character's right to a sexual alignment of his or her choice. However, Rule often defuses the issue of homosexuality within her work, particularly in her later novels, by focusing on characters' dilemmas as human beings rather than as merely sexual beings. Although lesbian and homosexual behavior is an integral aspect of all five of Rule's novels, she adopts a basically apolitical stance in her writing. She is certainly not within the camp of the radical lesbians, and has never used her novels as a forum to promulgate the gospel of lesbianism-is-best. If Rule takes a consistent stance in her novels at all, it is against stereotypes of any kind and for freely-chosen alliances,

whether heterosexual, homosexual or platonic in nature.

Rule's novels focus upon unconventional behavior of many sorts, of which homophile love is just one manifestation. She often assigns her characters a status of "difference" and brings them into conflict with society's restraining meshes. However, the best of her fiction extends beyond the concerns of individual dilemmas to problems of importance to a larger human community. Thus, in Rule's later novels, the emotional landscape expands from a consideration of two people who love each other in a particular way to whole groups of people who love one another in a variety of ways and often choose to translate that caring into a voluntary community.

Chapter I of this thesis briefly discusses previous lesbian literature and examines where Rule's work fits into this category. Although other novels will be alluded to when pertinent, this thesis will focus upon two primary sources of material -- Rule's novels themselves, and the author's own commentary about her writing. It should be noted that although much of the sub-genre of "lesbian literature" has been written in languages other than English (primarily French), this thesis will examine only those works first written in English, although others may have been read as background references.

Chapter II examines Rule's handling of two specifically lesbian relationships in her first two novels. In Desert of the Heart, both central characters acknowledge their love and opt for a future together, thus showing homophile love in a positive light. In This Is Not For You, even the title proclaims renunciation and the protagonist's stance is one of denial and abnegation.

Chapter III discusses Rule's third and fourth novels, Against the Season and The Young in One Another's Arms, companion pieces which both discuss voluntary forms of human community. In these novels, Rule expands her theme from specific consideration of homophile alliances to a broader concern with alternative choices in human community. Chapter IV focuses on Rule's most recent novel, Contract with the World, in which Rule incorporates homosexuals and heterosexuals within the same community once again, in an attempt to explore the need for shared experience as well as such human concerns as creativity, mental health and family life.

By the conclusion of the thesis I hope to have illustrated the development within Rule's fiction over the past twenty years, with particular emphasis upon what the author has said about her own directions in her novels and how these intentions function critically within her own work.

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CHAPTER I

Readers who turn to Jane Rule's fiction for clenched-fisted polemics, hard-core smut, lesbian apologias or sneering sketches of pathetic heterosexuals will be sorely disappointed. In her five novels Rule refrains from taking up verbal cudgels either for lesbianism or against heterosexuality. She does not apologize abjectly for those of her characters who love persons of their own sex, nor does she paint them as blessed with a superior wisdom. She conveys heterosexuality and homosexuality as simply two faces of human attraction rather than as antipodal tendencies. Furthermore, Rule resists suggesting that one orientation of loving is easier, more normal, or more noble than another. She is careful not to categorize her characters, not to attach labels to them.

Rule's primary novelistic concern seems to be the depiction of human beings struggling to make valid individual choices and thus to live their lives as best they can. Her stance is not to declaim or to actively proselytize; her most compelling writing tool is strong characterization. Rule implies the need for a more humanized and less stratified social order by creating personae who are struggling to effect such social changes within their own lives. If the reader believes in these characters, and accepts their inherent integrity, he or she will listen when they suggest different "languages for loving,"[1] and will be sympathetic to their "mortal stammer in the heart."[2] Concerned as she is with man's right to self-determination as a progressive and responsible intellectual being, Rule is too much

of a humanist ever to engage in polemics. However, she is also often much too fastidious to limn the inner anguish which might precede acceptance of a homosexual nature. Concomitantly, Rule seldom more than mentions-in-passing the despair and sordidness a homophobic society forces upon certain aspects of homosexual socializing.

Many of Rule's characters are homosexual; many are heterosexual. She does not define her characters merely by their sexual proclivities nor are a character's sex habits necessarily his or her most interesting traits. Rule is loathe to over-emphasize sexuality or sexual descriptions, perhaps because she is aware of all the bad lesbian pornography which professes "understanding" and "acceptance" while engaging in exploitation. One suspects that the vulture of readers' sexual prurience looms a large shadow over Rule's shoulder as she writes. Certain of her comments suggest such a sensitivity:

> People will say, "if you're going to write about relationships like this [lesbian] and you're not going to be erotic, what's the point?" Because we as a culture define these relationships as only erotic . . . . If it seems to me important to deal with sexual technicalities, fine. I do. But I'm much more interested in the whole dynamic of people moving together. Sexual scenes, like plot, tend to distract from the sense of what is actually going on between those two people. . . . sexuality in itself is something that people are still so prurient about, still so excited about, that it's a heavy weight inside any delicate framework. You introduce it and it's like a fist smashing against a face.[3]

The fist, one must note, is all the more threatening if it carries the clout of homosexuality, if the face it strikes is conditioned to believe only in "boy-gets-girl" stories. Thus, Rule ensures that her characters face universal human dilemmas: choices must be made, risks taken, problems solved, principles tested, loves revealed,

fears overcome.

Presumably, because she acknowledges the complexity of the human condition, Rule prefers to avoid simplistic or polemical resolutions. Still, critics have faulted her for too little tension in her novels. At times, she seems too much the humanist: she is often too eager to make a homosexual's acceptance of his own nature a fait accompli, too ready to minimize the tension a lesbian must feel in acknowledging her "inversion," as society would have it. One understands Rule's reluctance to engage in the psychological dithering of a Gertrude Stein, whom Rule describes as "a woman famous for obscuring and eschewing meaning,"[4] or the apologetic explanations of a Radclyffe Hall, who felt her "inversion" placed her outside God's blessing.[5] And one certainly appreciates Rule's distaste for didacticism. However, considering that recent trends to sexual liberation have still left us with a decidedly heterosexual world, there may be occasions when Rule's restraint approaches hedging, when her avoidance of psychological tension maims the conviction of her novels.

Perhaps the major reason Rule's novels do not function as manifestos for the homosexual cause -- a situation for which she is roundly criticized by militant lesbians -- can be found in her own view of her function as a writer. She says she does not like to see her books "used as propaganda" and makes a sharp distinction between art and propaganda:

> The business of art is to manifest what is and propaganda is working at trying to make what ought to be. I'm not even interested in what ought to be most of the time.

> Now, I can get on a bandwagon, but I know perfectly well it's a frivolous activity compared to manifesting what is.[6]

Rule is interested, then, in creating art which imitates life rather than attempts to reform it. Since her role is one of reflection rather than reshaping, she is serving notice that she has no need to assume activist political stances. However, she does realize there are those who require such stances of her, and are disappointed when she will not provide them:

> . . . I've had an awful lot of reviewers take me to task for not being political, for having no other great interest than writing some kind of gentle soap opera. The Desert of the Heart got a very bad review in Quebec because I got all the social analysis correctly, I understood everything that was wrong, then I bloody well accepted it instead of blowing the place up![7]

Rule sees that some of her critics expect more of her than she is prepared to give and place expectations upon her that do not fall within her own world view, but she makes no apologies for that situation. Furthermore, Rule is totally aware that to be sexually "different" in a society obsessed with quantifying, discussing and describing sexual normalcy is a painful circumstance indeed. At the age of fifteen, she made her own discoveries when she read The Well of Loneliness:

> I suddenly discovered that I was a freak, a genetic monster, a member of a third sex, who would eventually call myself by a masculine name (telephone operators were already addressing me as "sir"), wear a necktie, and live in the exile of some European ghetto.[8]

That Rule has been forced to do none of those things, assume none of those identities, is as much a function of her talent, courage and luck as it is a result of more liberalized attitudes. Indeed,

many have not been as talented or as lucky (as Rule herself must have known even before her fan mail confirmed it), although she says the reaction to The Desert of the Heart surprized her:

> . . . what I didn't expect was to hear from all the readers who were in anguish. I was shocked by the number of people who were needy for that book.[9]

Rule's compassion and her guarded optimism must have encouraged and supported countless readers; one can imagine how eagerly her first novel must have been seized upon in 1964. Rule has admitted that her hopeful novel, The Desert of the Heart, has usurped Radclyffe Hall's abject The Well of Loneliness as the "lesbian Bible," but does not see the creation of other works dedicated to lauding lesbian love as her mandate as an artist.

All of Rule's novels contain some references to homosexuality and none of them conveys the practice of such preference in either a sentimentalized or a sensationalized fashion. Rule does not spend much time writing glowing descriptions of the hills and valleys of female bodies, nor does she allow characters to wax poetic about the beauties of a loved one's nipples, as Kate Millett indulges herself in Sita. Rule does not portray her homosexual characters deteriorating into madness, as does Djuna Barnes; debauching their nights away in basement bars, as does Marie-Claire-Blais; subsiding into helplessly-obsessed infatuation, as does Kate Millett; agonizing in a sea of confusion, as does Gertrude Stein or expiring of consumption in lofts, as does Radclyffe Hall. Rule is clearly aware of, and determined to reject, the stereotyped stances which infused the work of many of her precursors in the lesbian literary genre.

On the other hand, she is also reluctant to rejoice in romantic female love as did Sappho, the most famed lesbian of them all.

Rule seems determined simply to portray lesbians and male homosexuals as very ordinary people, with no more than an average share of either goodness or evil in their makeup. Rule never overtly suggests that all lesbians are happy, that none lead anguished lives. She just does not dwell upon any such star-crossed characters because, she claims, she does not encounter such individuals in her life and she writes of what she knows. However, Rule is well aware of how her audience might react to her "normalized" descriptions of an orientation still deemed "abnormal" by many segments of society:

> I think it's important to talk about the lesbian material in my books. It's certainly there, it's there very strongly and I suspect it always will be. I don't think of it [the lesbian community], as I'm sure a great deal of my audience does, as a kind of special ghetto group in the world. I have never lived in a subculture. I have never felt excluded from the human family or [a] job or social life. I feel as if the popular attitude toward lesbian experience does make cliches, does make ghettoes. Most of the homosexuals I know live in the ordinary community, working, having dinner parties, being themselves and being known. And yet there's the persistent sense that homosexuals are defined by their sexuality and excluded by their sexuality. I never have been, nor have numbers of my friends.[10]

What Rule is describing here is a tension between the way well-adjusted homosexuals see themselves and the way society envisions them. In her personal commentary, Rule acknowledges the impetus within society which would like to maroon homosexuals beyond the mainstream by isolating them in a ghetto group or labelling them as <u>avis rara</u> not to be taken seriously. However, little of this tension or dissonance finds its way into her novels. She is sure

"a great deal" of her audience wishes further grounds on which to ostracize homosexuals, but Rule will not comply. In this sense, it might be argued that her refusal to perpetuate certain stereotypes is in itself a political stance. If it is, one assumes radical lesbians remain unplacated because such an approach is not sufficiently activist.

Rule is well aware that refusing to stereotype or sensationalize gay characters is one way of "normalizing them" and knows traditional "straight" society often feels threatened by such depiction:

> The sense . . . in society, is that special sexuality is totally defining and limiting. I'm not writing to prove that isn't so, I'm simply writing out of my sense of the world as I live in it. But there are so many misconceptions. One of the difficulties of my fiction is getting through to a sensibility that expects, first of all, it ought to be erotic because that's the only point in writing about people who are homosexual, and second, there is something morally depraved about it. Or, conversely, my fiction should connect readers with a whole sense of love, wonder and liberation . . . .[11]

Here Rule indicates a clear recognition of a certain type of reader, a negative fan, if you will, who comes to her work with certain definite expectations. Such negative fans seem to come in two categories: those who do not want to encounter characters like themselves because that does not suit their aforementioned prurient curiosity and those, at the opposite end of the spectrum, who crave a sense of "love and wonder" because they desperately need to hear that homosexuals are better, more sensitive and more aware, than their heterosexual counterparts. However admirable Rule's reluctance to engage with the expectations of her negative fans, however

understandable her choice to hew her own path, the average reader might sometimes need a little more explanation than she gives, might occasionally wonder how a character gets to a point of serene acceptance of atypical status in a conforming world. Rule is, I believe, honest in her intention to avoid propaganda, a flaw for which she faults Radclyffe Hall. And she is sincere in her desire to paint the homosexual community as she knows it. But it must be pointed out that Rule has made a decision to remove herself from much of the hurly-burly of modern life. In the 1977 edition of Canada Writes, published by the Writers' Union of Canada, Rule says in a biographical note:

> Three years ago I didn't renew my contract with the world, and now I live on a small island in B.C., trying to learn French so that I can read Marie-Claire Blais in the original, writing, watching eagles.[12]

Aside from pre-viewing the title of her fifth novel, the above statement implies a certain withdrawal on Rule's part. It is certainly her right as a writer, and a person desiring tranquillity, to make such a choice, but one wonders if it has not enabled Rule to look through gauze-covered lenses at the still-pervasive negative aspects of gay and lesbian life. Just four years ago, The Gay Report, a sympathetic and widely-praised study of homosexuality, contained in its introductory chapter this statement:

> It is a fact that many straight people despise homosexuals. For some this hatred is based on ignorance, or on their inability to deal with the idea that other people are different. The problem of homophobia, as this anti-gay hatred is called, is very complex and is closely related to the rigid sex-role stereotype system for men and women that is now being attacked and defended strenuously in our culture.[13]

Since Jane Rule was one of those who responded favorably to The Gay Report, one understands her novels' sympathetic concurrence with the study's main emphases: gays' resentment of being pigeonholed, their distaste for being dealt with exclusively on the basis of their sexuality, their desire to be seen as "ordinary." However, there are occasions -- notably the conclusion of Rule's fifth novel -- when it seems dramatic tension and emotional honesty are sacrificed to attain "normalized" resolutions within Rule's writing.

Certainly, Rule will never satisfy her negative fans in either the prurient or the impassioned camp because she is too much of a realist, according to her view of the world, and too little of a propagandist. Despite vociferous posturing, negative fans are seldom pleased with reflections of a society or a reality that do not mirror their own expectations. Rule knows this fact very well:

> I certainly don't write about love, wonder and liberation in any circumstance because we're all hedged around with requirements, bewilderments and questions. Many of the characters I write about are not homosexual. I think one of the most offensive things in my work for people who are defensive about it is that the people I write about who are homosexuals are not ghettoized, are not excluded, are not strange, peculiar, sick people. That's very scary. It's like saying, "These are human beings." And that's the one thing you mustn't say.[14]

In writing of the thing "you mustn't say," that is, in portraying homosexuals as ordinary people rather than exotics, Rule enables readers -- perhaps even forces them -- to demystify their attitudes towards certain facets of human sexuality. In the process, readers may have to grapple with disquieting private feelings about sexuality and sexual attraction.

Rule would be the first to admit that the shedding of ritual or stereotypic responses is an unsettling business. Until just recently, it was a business about which publishers were skittishly wary. Much of the lesbian literature discusses at length the "booze and heartbreak" motif of all but the most recent fiction about gay and lesbian relationships. In Sappho Was a Right-On Woman, Sidney Abbott and Barbara Love discuss publishers' reluctance to promote positive lesbian novels:

> Publishing houses have always been interested in novels about Lesbians that end in suicide, despair, and separation, preferably brought about by the introduction of the "right man" into the life of one woman who really wasn't a Lesbian at all. He, of course, takes her away to a better life. Beyond the fact that publishers don't want stories with happy endings about Lesbians because they might encourage Lesbianism, there is also the suspicion that they just don't believe happy endings are possible or realistic.[15]

Consciously or unconsciously, Jane Rule appears set to prove such publishers wrong; her novels often do not have a traditionally peaches-and-cream happy ending, but their resolution is generally hopeful. Certainly, Rule and other recent writers like her are skillfully "breaking the pattern of astonishing sameness" journalist Bettie Wysor comments upon in The Lesbian Myth:

> Almost without fail, one or both of the partners had to reform to heterosexuality, usually overwhelmed by the irresistible charm and force of a strong and positive male bent on rescue . . . . it was expected that one or both of the lesbian partners would see the light and reform to heterosexuality, but if that did not happen, one of the women would likely commit suicide or decline and expire as a result of sexual excesses, drug addiction, alcoholism and other vices accompanying lesbian practices. Not to be dismissed either were the possibilities of insanity or demise by other violent means. Certainly everyone

> knew without doubt that lesbianism, like masturbation, would result in all kinds of physical ills such as tuberculosis, dangerous depressions, brain tumor and eventual unhingement of the mind.
>
> It was also quite necessary for one of the partners to be grotesquely hermaphroditic, transvestite, or so absurdly butch and pathetic as to be the object of great hilarity, ridicule or instant revulsion. She would also need to be sadistic, outrageously promiscuous, and totally male-imitative . . .[16]

Small wonder Rule is intent upon creating lesbian characters who lack outstanding quirks or physical properties; small surprize she adjures through her novels that homosexuals be seen as the average rather than the exotic.

Until the mid-sixties, the two commonly-accepted classics among novels of lesbian experience written in English -- Radclyffe Hall's The Well of Loneliness and Djuna Barnes' Nightwood -- were hardly joyous paeans to lesbian bliss. Interestingly enough, both novels bear the imprimatur of male approval. Hall's novel is launched with a commentary by Havelock Ellis, who praises it for its "notable psychological and sociological significance," and designates it as "the first English novel which presents, in a completely faithful and uncompromising form, one particular aspect of sexual life as it exists among us today."[17] That the "particular aspect" Hall chose to convey was terribly unpalatable to a certain segment of the English public is proven by the scandalized outcry by such guardians of public morality as publisher James Douglas, and the subsequent trial and book burning. Barnes' 1935 novel bears a foreword by none other than T. S. Eliot, who terms it "so good a novel that only sensibilities trained on poetry can wholly appreciate it."[18] The modern reader finds Eliot's bit of literary snobbery hardly warranted

by Nightwood, an inexplicable book whose frequent powerful images might be better appreciated if one understood their symbolism or meaning. If Eliot's comments gave Barnes the stamp of erudition, Ellis' introduction tendered Hall's melodramatic tale far greater medical approbation than it deserves. Hall's novel reads like an apologia for inversion and bristles with Biblical and medical references intended to validate Stephen Gordon's dilemma. One can understand that the self-abnegation of The Well of Loneliness would depress Rule, but Nightwood is hardly cheerier, ending as it does with Nora looking on in horror as her former lover, Robin, crouches in a chapel, barking in imitation of a dog and laughing insanely.

Unlike many authors, particularly the now-scorned Hall, Rule is not obsessed by explaining the causes of lesbianism. She sees no need to explain because, essentially, she appears not to polarize love and sexual attraction into certain allowable or normal combinations. She states:

> I don't think there is such a thing as understanding Lesbianism. I think there is such a thing as understanding a range of human experiences and being able to understand that one man could love another or one woman could love another or that they could be attracted to each other. I think a lot of people have difficulty in my fiction understanding how any of those people relate in the ways they do . . .[19]

Rule here implies that people are conditioned to view love in conventional ways and thus do not always find her romances credible. This remark also seems to suggest that love is a rather mysterious random process of selection which cannot be simply explained and which may not even be explainable on rational grounds. Since we all accept that heterosexual love falls into this category, Rule

intimates, why should it be different for homosexual affection? Rule does not assume the stance of such radical lesbians as Jill Johnston, who makes clear in her personal and polemical collection of essays, Lesbian Nation, that loving women is an active political choice women must make if they are to avoid "delivering their most vital energies to the oppressor."[20] Rule, although well aware of the long history of tension between the sexes, does not settle for Johnston's didactic "us-versus-them" approach to sexual politics. Asked in an interview how she rationalizes the "origin of lesbianism," Rule's answer is revealing of a certain attitude:

> I think there is only one origin: that you love another woman. The person you love is the motivation.[21]

If one accepts Johnston as a spokeswoman for lesbian militants, it is clear that Rule's approach to the issue of homosexuality is quite unacceptable to the radical lesbian sensibility. "Feminism," Johnston writes, "at heart is a massive complaint. Lesbianism is the solution."[22] Johnston's response to those who explain their lesbian activity by saying they love someone who "just happens to be a woman," is, typically, blunt and uncompromising:

> Bisexuality is an intermediary solution for women on the way to relating completely with their sisters. Bisexuality is not so much a cop-out as a fearful compromise.[23]

Jane Rule's novels would indicate she does not concur: there are several bisexual characters in her work and none are painted in shades of fearful compromise. In The Desert of the Heart, Ann loves Bill, but comes to find Evelyn more suitable; Silver loves Ann with gusto, but settles down to motherhood with Joe. In Against the Season,

Peter Fallidon's preference for marriage with a woman, Harriet, is at best tentative, while Grace Hill seems to derive social security from her husband, but sexual stimulation from Dina. The irrepressible Gladys, in The Young in One Another's Arms, appears healthily bisexual, and in Contract with the World, Alma has a relationship of some intensity, if not sexual satisfaction, with Mike before she turns to Roxanne.

In Lesbian Images, her own study of lesbian writers, Rule's introductory remarks are candid and self-revealing. She admits to having been "badly frightened" by reading Hall's The Well of Loneliness when she was fifteen; frightened, one supposes, by the self-pitying plea for acceptance which pervades Stephen Gordon's story. Fortunately, shortly thereafter Rule experienced a positive love affair with a woman, which likely did much to effect her later well-adjusted sense of self. She says her first sexual experiences

> confirmed for me very early the value of loving, the awareness of sex as one of the languages for loving rather than either an identity or an act of possession. To be a lover was no more a label, under these circumstances, than to be a daughter or sister or friend, responsibilities and pleasures I have not, even now, devalued in order to own and be owned by another person . . . .[24]

Obviously, Rule views lesbian relationships as but one articulation of loving, and is not prone to attaching labels to human interactions. Repeatedly, her novels stress that loving is not an easy task, no matter what the relationship, who the beloved or the lover. She observes:

> Clearly, whether one chooses one's left hand or one's right, the task remains the same. And whether one chooses a woman or a man, the requirement to love is the same . . . .[25]

What Rule seems to be conveying here -- a benediction for human love of whatever sort -- is reminiscent of Gertrude Stein's much-quoted statement in The Making of Americans:

> I like loving. I like mostly all the ways anyone can have of having loving feeling in them. Slowly it has come to be in me that any way of being a loving one is interesting and not unpleasant to me.[26]

Rule lacks Stein's convolutions -- not necessarily a bad thing -- but the essence of both women's remarks is similar: human love is not to be trammelled by mere labels. Rule does not spend pages describing the "differences" of lesbian passion basically because she intellectually refuses to differentiate it from heterosexual passion. Like American poet-novelist May Sarton, Rule is a modern-day humanist rather than either a sexologist or a polemicist.

Although in Lesbian Images Rule is critical of Sarton's tendency to romanticism, it is that writer's body of work which bears most resemblance to Rule's own novels. Sarton's writing carries the stamp of what one can only call a "low-key lesbian" sensibility. Several of her characters are bisexual and many of the females she creates have powerful and long-term relationships with other women in which sexuality may or may not be a factor. In Mrs. Stevens hears the mermaids singing, the principal character, an author finally winning recognition after a long life, gives a young homosexual friend advice which echoes Rule's own philosophy:

> It's people that matter, Mar, not sexes or ages.[27]

Sarton is both a compelling and humane writer, despite Rule's complaint of the restrictions and confusions in her work caused by her "cultural inheritance from Freud which makes her call a great many

needs and strength which are simply human either masculine or feminine."[28] Sarton's warmth, humanistic interest in people and her willingness to explore women's roles, as well as her concern to show positive ways in which men and women may share life together, make her more akin to Rule than many other modern novelists.

Rule clearly sees her job in the world as that of writing books and short stories, not publicizing either herself or the lesbian cause. In Lesbian Images she confesses, "I am not in any way comfortable as a public person,"[29] as a way of explaining her initial reluctance to embark on a book about lesbian writers. The publication this year of Rule's much more political Outlander, a collection of essays and short stories, suggests the author has learned to be more at ease declaring her lesbianism. However, Rule has long been loathe to assume a high profile, unlike many Canadian authors who find themselves trapped into playing a role as a certain type of "literary personality." In a 1976 interview, she is quoted as saying:

> I told my editors at Doubleday: "It's my job to write the books and yours to sell them. I will not be sold by the pound on talk shows, exploited, consumed and spit out."[30]

For Rule, an admitted lesbian, the risk of being either savaged or patronized on promotion tours across the nation is an ever-present reality; perhaps her reluctance to be sold by the pound is necessary to self-preservation. It is certainly a stance of considerable integrity. But again one wonders if such a choice, like her island existence, does not allow Rule too much opportunity to avoid confrontation with the uglier aspects of the collision

between a growing militancy among gays and implacable rejection by a still-homophobic society. Rule does admit that an author's lifestyle and choice of identities do influence the reader's view of her work, no matter how desirable is a complete separation between one's life and one's work. In Canadian literature particularly, where the pond is still so small, it is very difficult for a work of art to stand solely on its own simply because the data and gossip about writers is so accessible to anyone interested in the subject.

Rule also realizes that, although she may resist active or blatant proselytizing in her novels, the very subject of her writing itself serves as a sort of political statement, however genteel, in the eyes of a predominantly "officially heterosexual" society. She acknowledges the impossibility of writers' avoiding a political stance when the topic is lesbianism:

> I think any fair-minded statement about lesbian experience would have to be considered propaganda in a heterosexual world because there's so much homophobia in the world we live in. Anybody talking about it seriously and simply presenting it as a fact is thought of as a propagandist.[31]

Rule here indicates that, although she does not think of herself as a propagandist for the lesbian cause and does not see propaganda as a function of her art, she realizes others so interpret her work. Because her characters do live fulfilling lives as homosexuals, because they do not end their days in misery and ruin, Rule is painting pictures of positive possibilities for a hitherto scorned and self-hating group. She is suggesting <u>gay</u> need not mean <u>miserable</u> and <u>lesbian</u> need not connote <u>monster</u>. And to an avowed (or threatened) heterosexual, such ideas may sound very much indeed like-

propaganda. However, although she may not always achieve her goal, Rule is motivated by a much broader intent: to illustrate the varied ways human beings may choose to love one another, live together and build meaningful relationships. Sometimes the people living together are women; sometimes they are men; sometimes they are men and women. Rule hopes, one supposes, to break the reader of the habit of seeing happiness only in "boy-girl" combinations, although she does not deny that, if conditions are right, those combinations too can be fully rewarding.

In the final analysis, the answer to the question, "Is Rule a propagandist?" is both yes and no. Yes, if one considers her humanistic vision of voluntary human relationships; no, if one looks only at the issue of homosexuality. Her stance in her five novels clearly declares that freely-chosen human relationships are valid, no matter what the sex of the participants. Lesbianism may be just one of many choices for living a character makes in her life. Rule's novels reveal her heartfelt rejection of specifically applied labels and her strong support for human integrity in all relationships.

CHAPTER II

Jane Rule's first two novels, both of which focus primarily on lesbian relationships, convey opposite stances on what Colette termed, "the noble season of feminine passion."[1] In The Desert of the Heart, Rule explores the complexities of relationships in general and of one ultimately positive lesbian attachment in particular. This Is Not For You, on the other hand, although peopled with several characters unafraid of love, is ultimately a negative exploration because of the self-denial and willful renunciation represented by the narrator, Kate George. Tandem examination suggests Rule's first two novels can be seen as reverse images of each other: The Desert of the Heart reflects acceptance and culminates in the promise of fulfilling lesbian passion; This Is Not For You is infused with denial and shows a negative and sterile view of two women's love for each other. In both novels, characters face the conflict between acting in accordance with their natures or doing the "right" thing, that is, behaving in a manner approved by society, thereby launching themselves on the road to "salvation." In The Desert of the Heart, the protagonists finally admit that the "right" action is to accept a love which, although honest and heartfelt, will lead directly to "damnation" in society's eyes. Bereft of conventional approval, Evelyn and Ann must create their own sense of salvation, their own ethic apart from that promulgated in the society surrounding them. In This Is Not For You, Kate identifies herself as one who must do the "right" thing, and seems to accept the conventional dictates that entails, including attempting to hide her

own true nature from those around her and -- most of the time -- even refusing to face within herself her own sexual identity. Kate tries to twist her life (and Esther's as well) into a configuration approved by conventional morality. She, like Allen and Alma in Contract with the World, feels it is necessary to "pass" as a heterosexual, even though several of her friends and family see through the pose and even though she knows such a facade is dishonest and stifles her innermost needs. In the context of Rule's first two novels, a dichotomy is set up between appearance and reality. Doing the "right" thing can be seen as a prerequisite to winning acceptance within society, itself a form of safety if not "salvation." Kate George never fully confronts the dichotomy between her real and apparent lives, and does not have the courage of Ann and Evelyn, who acknowledge the gap between what society approves and what they actually are, and who determine not to sacrifice the latter in slavish conformity to the former.

In The Desert of the Heart, Evelyn Hall, a careful and self-contained academic, verges on giving up any impulse to love and commitment, but finally realizes such a course of action would be life-denying and ultimately self-destructive. Evelyn comes to understand that acknowledging the demands of love and one's own nature, and having the courage to act upon such emotions, provide the only antidote to the sterile heart. In This Is Not For You, Rule seems intent upon quite the opposite suggestion as she illustrates the soul-searing effect of Kate's denial of love. Kate George begins and ends her narrative-letter with a flat negation, "this is not for

you," a denial addressed to Esther Woolf, the only person she has ever cared for passionately and yet -- perversely? -- the only person she forbids herself to love actively. Kate seems bent on a grim-lipped sort of self-denial, the reasons for which are never articulated satisfactorily within the novel. Kate's self-denial has a spiritually crippling effect upon her entire emotional life, causing her to admit her love for fey, child-woman Esther only when it is too late for her to assume responsibility for such love, and never directly to Esther herself. Kate's refusal to follow admission with action creates a negation at the core of her life. The very existence of Kate's self-explanatory -- or is it self-justifying? -- letter is a hollow gesture: the letter will never be mailed and even if it were, Esther's order would not allow her to read it. When Andrew Belshaw angrily tells Kate she is "stingy," he is correct. Kate is parsimonious with that integral part of the self one must hazard in order to offer love.

Unlike Evelyn Hall, Kate George never discovers the courage to face the nature of her love for another woman to the extent of acknowledging it fully and daring to act upon that admission. Kate dares only to offer her version of "love" to women like Joyce, for whom she feels no lasting commitment, or to those like Grace, who are old and strong enough to have no real need for her and thus to require nothing from her. The only person able to inspire total love and dedication in Kate is her adoptive mother, for whom Kate rescinds her vows of emotional frugality and upon whom she lavishes care and affection. Unfortunately, Rule never requires Kate to explain the

cause for her deep ties with her mother, thus preventing the reader from understanding why Kate can love Mrs. George so totally, but withhold affection from Esther, who is also often helpless and in need of nurturing. A resourceful reader might first speculate that Kate does not admit her feelings for Esther because she is protecting her from an "unnatural" love, thus imparting undertones of sanctified unselfishness to Kate's denial. Or, with Esther's naked revelations of her own affection for Kate, a reader might refuse to be charitable, deciding fear and a need for self-protection prevent Kate from articulating her feelings for Esther. Basically, however, to make either assumption involves an annoying form of second-guessing the author's intent. Rule does not delineate either Kate's or Esther's character clearly enough to enable the reader to judge Kate's actions as being either right or wrong, understandable or reprehensible. Therefore, although Kate's choices are ultimately negative, her motivation remains nebulous and the reader quite rightly does not know how to evaluate her choices -- or, for that matter, her non-choices.

Subsequent discussion in this chapter will contrast the acceptance of lesbian relationships as developed in The Desert of the Heart with the sustained denial of such love by the central character in This Is Not For You. As a corollary, the concepts of salvation and damnation will be examined as functions of either denial or acceptance of love. In tracing Kate's course of negation, Rule illustrates the sterility of denial and self-abnegation; in conveying Ann's and Evelyn's hesitant acceptance of their love, Rule intimates

the possible joy awaiting them, even if they share lives for only a "limited" time. Ironically, Rule has observed that many critics liked This Is Not For You because of the abnegation central to it.[2] One assumes such critics were reassured because Kate "did the right thing" and did not pursue an "unnatural" alliance with Esther. Those same critics must have found The Desert of the Heart to be an unsettling, corrupting book because it ends with two women willingly establishing a relationship they know conventional society abhors. The negative-versus-positive tone found in Rule's first two novels is the closest her early work comes to assuming overt stances for or against lesbian love. Her method in both books is to illustrate the concepts of acceptance or denial by creating strong characters who opt for either course in their own lives. For the most part, Rule's fiction tends to avoid polemical statements about lesbianism.

The Desert of the Heart is the more densely-written and symbolic of Rule's first two novels. It also better succeeds in creating a fictional world and in peopling that world with credible characters. The Desert of the Heart, it must be observed, is also a much less claustrophobic book than is Rule's second novel, but the restriction in This Is Not For You is dictated by its theme and format. The point of view in The Desert of the Heart shifts from Evelyn to Ann and back again, thus enabling the reader to see the world from two different perspectives and to follow the development of each character at relatively the same pace. Furthermore, the arguments about accepting love engaged in by both Ann and Evelyn are structured like a balanced debate, whereas the presentation in This Is Not For You is all one-sided because of the unequal development of Kate and Esther's

personalities. In The Desert of the Heart, Rule juxtaposes Evelyn's cautious, controlling view of the world with Ann's impulsive, open-handed attitude, highlighting a particular trait in one woman by contrasting it with its opposite in the other. For instance, Evelyn's desire to have children, her failure to do so and her subsequent decision to protect herself from loving others' offspring is contrasted with Ann's idealistic effort to "love the whole damn world" and her adoption of five overseas foster children. In The Desert of the Heart, the reader is never forced to dwell upon the furnishings of but one character's mind, as is the case in This Is Not For You. In The Desert of the Heart, Rule attempts to show the interaction between nature, society and the individual to illustrate characters' duty to strike a balance between the dictates of nature and the demands and responsibilities of the society in which they live.[3] Rule would seem to ascribe to Christopher Lasch's view that the individual socialized by his or her society then becomes a personality with the ability to effect change within that same cultural agglomeration.[4] For the most part, as subsequent discussion will attempt to show, Rule is successful in maintaining the tension between the three forces of nature, society and the individual, bringing them to a positive fusion at the conclusion of The Desert of the Heart.

Rule herself has correctly described her first novel as an "incredibly rich book."[5] Although the novel is set in the Nevada desert, in a city devoted to the pursuit of Mammon, it still concludes in an affirmative fashion, with love taking precedence over

the aridity of the desert and human commitment defeating non-involvement. Rule makes a point of surrounding the lovers, Ann and Evelyn, with a primarily accepting atmosphere. She introduces hostile elements, but the reader is made aware that the primary objections to the lovers' union comes most strongly from within each woman herself who, each for her own reasons, resists accepting the relationship. In an interview several years ago, Rule described the environment surrounding Evelyn and Ann:

> There isn't any climate of hostility. But I chose that consciously. So many people in those days [the early 1960s] were trying to get sympathy for homosexuals by showing how mean everyone was to them. I didn't want to get into propaganda. I wanted them to say what they really would say and feel what they really would feel. I consciously didn't want to drag in a lot of social pressure to overshadow that.[6]

In other words, Rule wishes to make it clear that the conflict Ann and Evelyn feel about their love stems first from their own characters and secondarily from what they think "society" will have to say about their alliance. A skeptical reader might ask if that is an accurate portrayal and might wonder if "what people will say" is not the more potent inhibiting factor in human behavior, particularly atypical sexual behavior. Certainly, Rule does not avoid the implication that society will not approve of Ann and Evelyn: the factor of Ann's dismissal for her indecent proposal to the assistant to the dean, Bill's threat of talking to Evelyn's lawyer, the surveillance of the army helicopter and even Walter's well-meaning protective urge represent pressure by a judgmental society. However, Rule takes care never to imply that the entire world is against Evelyn and Ann or that they are doomed to be outcasts within society. The most she

suggests is that each woman must compromise to make the relationship work and that their love is fraught with chance. The unanswered corollary question is, 'what relationship is not risky?'

Two striking and opposite images prevail through The Desert of the Heart: the awesome presence of the desert and the repeated occurrence of mirrors. The desert functions as the symbol of raw nature while the mirrors symbolize the artificial constructs society erects to govern human interaction and reflect man's behavior to himself. Even the mirrors in Frank's Club represent that establishment's particular morality, and serve as a reminder to employees to "keep honest" and obey the behavior code of the casino.

Evelyn initially finds the desert frightening because she senses in it the antithesis of control, the opposite of all the tidy conventions which have hitherto governed her circumscribed life. She suspects there is more to life than mere convention when the trip to Reno forces her to begin shedding past habits. When she encounters the desert, she discovers an echo of a place within herself she has yet to explore:

> At the end was the desert, sudden, flat, dull miles of it until it heaved itself upward and became the mountains. An irrational fear, as alien to Evelyn's nature as heat lightning seems to a summer sky, struck through her body. For a moment she could not move. Then she turned quietly, refusing in herself the desire to run . . . (page 22)

Unlike Evelyn, Ann loves the desert specifically for its primal state, for its absence of civilization beyond the community it tolerates. When Ann's oneness with the desert becomes evident, she too appears a threat to Evelyn. As the older woman admits the

strength and beauty of the desert, it symbolizes her desire for Ann, a desire she initially refuses to acknowledge. Evelyn tells herself:

> Ann Childs was an accident; that was all. . . .
> "And I shall feel tender toward her if I like." (p. 20)

Here, she is allowing herself to regard Ann only as "child," as a non-sexual being, for whom tenderness, but not desire, is permissible.

Later, when Evelyn accepts the nature of her love for Ann, she loses her fear of the miles of empty sand, and develops her own sense of recklessness in the face of its power. Thus, Rule's symbolism suggests layers within layers of meaning. Society with its mirrors and codes of behavior functions as "natural" man's censor, just as Reno is an unnatural -- that is, man-made -- intrusion upon the desert. Furthermore, society's judgements are an intrusion upon the natural unfolding of the "unnatural" love between Ann and Evelyn.

The mirror image adds resonance to Rule's exploration of lesbian love. Ann's resemblance to Evelyn, as reflected in the quotation, "Hello is what a mirror says," (page 12) invokes the idea of the double as well as the narcissism inherent in lesbian lovemaking. Radical lesbians find ideal the reflection of two biologically-similar bodies interacting sexually. Overstating her case as usual, Jill Johnston explains lesbian narcissism as follows:

> The erotic potential between like organisms consists in the enhancement of self through narcissistic identification. Narcissism is the ideal appreciation of self. Women who love their own sex love the sameness in the other. They become both subject and object to each other . . . .[7]

This is certainly a more sanguine interpretation of narcissism than that suggested by the Greek myth of the self-enamoured youth

Narcissus[8] or the state of perpetual selfishness deplored by the American social critic Lasch. Rule uses the mirror image of Ann and Evelyn's resemblance to foreshadow their coming intimacy, and to point up a difference in ages which enables Ann to be mistaken for Evelyn's daughter. There is, however, nothing motherly in the blatant display of mirrors adorning Silver's bathroom. There, the mirrors have a more benign presence than those in Frank's Club; Silver's mirrors exist for pleasure and sensuality, rather than commerce and scrutiny. However, the private need for mirrors suggests individuals' tendency to focus on themselves and also implies the difficulty of knowing the self -- a feat both Evelyn and Ann attempt but Kate avoids. Although she employs such symbols variously, Rule does not allow the images of mirror or desert to remain negative. Evelyn ultimately comes to acknowledge the vitality, beauty and power of the desert, just as she decides to forego the conventions of society, act upon her desire for Ann and risk "damnation." At the end of the novel, the mirror functions as a hopeful symbol: the glass doors of the courthouse reflect Evelyn and Ann together, moving toward a shared future, even if it is one that may last only "an indefinite period of time." (p. 251)

Each of the protagonists in The Desert of the Heart must do battle with her own nature, and revise her own theories of "salvation" and "damnation" in order to accept love. Evelyn must conquer her conventionality; Ann must overcome her reluctance to risk commitment. As mentioned previously, Rule structures the novel to reflect alternating points of view. Chapter one shows the world through a

cautious academic's eyes; chapter two portrays life as the cynical young cartoonist sees it. Rule's introduction of Evelyn as one who rationally examines facts before acting and who retains firm control of her emotions is offset in the second chapter by Ann's more impetuous, relaxed attitudes. Evelyn's arrival in Reno unsettles her, forces her to examine her identity anew. Her meeting of her mirror image, however, still prompts her to rationalize:

> Ann was almost young enough to be her own child. But only a parent could be allowed to feel tenderness for his own likeness. In a childless woman such tenderness was at least narcissistic. And Evelyn had learned the even less flattering names applied to the love a childless woman might feel for anything: her dogs, her books, her students, . . . yes, even her husband. She was not afraid of the names themselves, but she was afraid of the truth that might be in them. This resemblance was, she knew, not a trick need had played on her; neither was it a miracle. (p. 20)

Evelyn is aware of society's epithets for women like herself; her biggest fear, however, is not of the names but of their validity, of what they might suggest about her true nature. Evelyn, like Kate George, has always been one who has believed in finding "salvation through work," has lived through her books and flatters herself that she is "intellectually emancipated in all perversions of flesh, mind, and spirit." (p. 124) However, her habit is to hold herself aloof from life, to maintain an aesthetic distance in much the same manner as does Rosemary in Against the Season.

When Rule presents the world as Ann sees it, in chapter two, she illustrates both the danger and the sensual freedom awaiting Evelyn. If Evelyn embraces Ann's view of "damnation," she must cease to seek

salvation through propriety, and must act upon her feelings. The casino is regarded by outsiders as tawdry and seamy, but its employees share a certain warmth and camaraderie. In the relaxed ethos of the club, Ann's restive nature encounters both the love of Bill and the passion of Silver. The former threatens to enclose Ann too closely with his demands and the overblown affection of the latter is somehow insufficient. Such a triangle occurs frequently in Rule's fiction, where we find many characters able to engage in love unrestricted by a partner's gender. Ann seems to reject Bill not because he is male but because he would circumscribe her with unacceptable expectations. When Ann glimpses herself in a mirror at Frank's Club, she observes:

> There was her own face separated from her, not magnified as her voice had been, instead made smaller. What a device of conscience that mirror was, for behind it, at any time, might be the unknown face of a security officer, watchful, judging; yet you could not see it. You could not get past your own minimized reflection. (pp. 33-34)

The mirror symbol suggests a connection between the mores of society and the observers behind the two-way glass: one knows rules and observers exist but one does not know when they are being applied to one or watching one's behavior. The "faceless" observers behind the glass are akin to society's intangible "they" who "say" certain behavior is aberrant.

Enroute to her re-definition of "salvation," Evelyn must reassess her idea of the value of convention. She finds that, as she awaits her divorce, society's conventions for beginnings are not balanced by rituals for termination. She has always had a way of handling things and a course of action, but finds in Reno that

"there was nothing to do"; in other words, she realizes she is no longer totally in control of the events in her life. When she realizes she understands the desperate loneliness of Virginia Ritchie, the reluctant divorcee, Evelyn is also humbled to discover the isolation one experiences when one steps outside one of society's sheltering conventions -- in this case, marriage. This self-discovery foreshadows the more potent isolation society is capable of imposing upon those who step outside convention to the degree of admitting a lesbian attachment. Against the reality of the town marooned in the desert, Rule juxtaposes the "desert island game" of self-sufficiency Evelyn plays with the four books she has brought to Reno. The self-imposed isolation ceases to be a game when Evelyn realizes it is externally directed, that she cannot control it and it is "the new condition of her life." Driven into communion with her landlady, Frances Parker, Evelyn finds that even she mistrusts the dictates of society and sees that "conventions can be a kind of trap." For all her traditional concerns, Frances is very liberal about the proper sort of love:

> It's love I want for Ann. I don't think I really care very much how she gets it. (p. 67)

Later, we will see that Esther's mother, for all her faults, tells Kate much the same thing, thereby passing an unspoken sanction on love between the two women, much as Frances does when she learns of the situation between Ann and Evelyn. Both situations are examples of the rare instances in Rule's fiction when characters are allowed to suggest "how things ought to be."

Ann and Evelyn's growing awareness of the attraction between them is unfolded against the backdrop of the desert. The first moment of physical revelation occurs atop Geiger Point, when the altitude makes Evelyn dizzy, and Ann touches her neck and shoulders. The moment is fleeting, but Evelyn recognizes it:

> Ann closed herself so quickly that Evelyn could have been uncertain of what she had seen, but she had taught too many students not to recognize the unguarded look and the silence. In her office, she would have known just how to behave. She would have assigned an extra essay on Donne and turned the longing into scholarship. Now, without a role to play, she was uncertain. (p. 74)

Without her academic setting and her aesthetics to provide a buffer zone, Evelyn is at a loss. Ann's blunt confession about her "indecent proposal to the special assistant to the Dean" further confounds her. Ann's attitude about the incident is flippant and self-deprecating and not entirely satisfactory:

> Here I am, discussing the nature of my problem. I am not disoriented or confused. It will never really seem natural, but . . . (p. 76)

This is one of the few instances in Rule's fiction when the nature of lesbianism is discussed directly, and the "but" followed by ellipsis is annoying to the reader, who at this point is quite justified in expecting some explanation, some insight into how Ann has come to accept the "nature" of her problem with such an apparent lack of anguish. One does not want a Freudian treatise, or reams of justification, but it does seem Rule owes the reader some explanation of how Ann regards her own sexuality, since the entire novel hinges on such understanding. Like Evelyn, Rule as author has "been at the edge of a cliff and ha[s] retreated." One senses the possibility of

a deeper problem: perhaps at this juncture in her work, Rule is unable to accept for herself or her characters the label, "lesbian." Are we to assume that Ann's love for Evelyn is only the accidental loving of another woman, that there was no sexual attraction on her part to the dean's assistant? Rule gives us no clues.

The next physical confrontation between the pair again occurs in the desert, away from the constraints of society and outside the pale of civilized moral strictures, at Pyramid Lake where the "sand" consists of "tiny white snail shells, no bigger than the head of a pin." When she beholds the vast alkaline lake, Evelyn doesn't want to go on with the excursion:

> She wanted Ann to turn the car around and drive back to Reno, which, alien and hostile as it might be, was at least human. There was no way Evelyn could comprehend this unnatural dead body of water, still, killing, blue. Yet she could not ask to leave. She lacked both the courage and the cruelty to refuse. (p. 120)

There is a paganism about the lake which forces one back upon one's inner resources, and Evelyn already feels her aesthetic distance endangered. If Evelyn loses her ability to hold Ann at arm's length, she loses control and the illusion of potential salvation, which we now understand means non-involvement to Evelyn. The emotional distance between the two women is prominent when Evelyn confesses to Ann that she fears the desert because it looks too much like "the seventh circle of hell" and she fears damnation. Ann replies that she likes the desert because it offers the simple truth about the world: that men cannot get a living from the earth and thus must obtain it from each other. She claims to be more afraid

of the "rotting vegetation" of salvation than she is of damnation, which she welcomes, and prefers the cleanliness of either burning or freezing in the desert to being trapped by society's conventions. What Ann does fear, however, is "giving in" to the habit of simple reproduction. She sees that sort of focussed fertility as a trap, just as Evelyn fears entrapment in any sort of passion she cannot control. At the lake, Evelyn cannot imagine walking into the water "of her own free will," just as she does not agree with Ann's reckless statement that, "we can't have what we need, but we can take what we want." (p. 118) As one might expect, Ann's solution is to "love the whole damned world," and Evelyn's is, characteristically, to keep it at arm's length. Thus, when she rejects Ann's kiss (a bid for intimacy) with a truism overheard at a cocktail party, Evelyn is reacting typically.

> Evelyn looked at Ann, the child she had always wanted, the friend she had once had, the lover she had never considered. Of course she wanted Ann. Pride, morality, and inexperience had kept her from admitting it frankly to herself from the first moment she had seen Ann. Guilt and goodness must now keep her from admitting it to Ann. "No relationship is without erotic feeling," Evelyn said. She had heard it somewhere at a cocktail party, an academic cocktail party. Someone else had added, as she added now, "But that doesn't necessarily mean it has to be acted upon." (p. 124)

Evelyn will not explain more, will not admit that she cannot control her response to Ann's body. She rationalizes by telling herself, "It was not important. To exaggerate a single kiss into significant guilt was a real loss of aesthetic distance." The sudden violence of the storm prefigures the impending unleashing of emotion between Ann and Evelyn, but the latter is not yet ready to surrender and must

reassert her authority by driving through the storm:

> The wheel, firm and restricting in Evelyn's hands, gave her back a simple feeling of authority and independence. She was in control, and she had an excuse to keep her eyes away from the vast expanse of desert, away from Ann, carefully on the long, straight road back to Reno. (p. 126)

The road, of course, leads Evelyn away from temptation, back to the salvation of society, away from a confrontation with her nature and back to the safety of conventional behavior.

Following the revelation at Pyramid Lake, Evelyn's mind, normally her tool, becomes a weapon against herself. She struggles with the symbolism of the idea of living in the desert forever, of dwelling where nature dictates and there are no sheltering rocks of convention to rest against. Unlike Kate George, Evelyn sees the risk of drawing ease from one's idea of one's own rightness, and adapts the 23rd Psalm to her own dilemma:

> Only the good can be guilty. And surely guilt and goodness will follow me all the days of my life unless I can dwell in the desert forever, a voluntary exile, a permanent resident. (p. 129)

However, she concludes such exile "isn't necessary." She tells herself she is free to leave, that she still has the power of making choices for herself; she is, in short, frightened by what Ann represents:

> She would not cluster fragments of memory into fixed shapes of fear and failure. If she had been wrong before, the error was in her nature, not in her will. She had never excused herself. She had never indulged her weaknesses as if they were needs. Surely she could not be judged for a nature her will had never consented to. She had been good.

But she knows that goodness is often not enough, that sometimes out of

the good intention comes wrong action, comes a woman who habitually wears "one ill-fitting uniform after another of the world's conventions."

Ironically, a project involving children that, technically speaking, belong to neither of them, effects the physical union of Ann and Evelyn. Shopping for Ann's foster children seems to cure Evelyn's inhibitions -- and again, Rule must be faulted here for insufficient motivation as we do not know what brings Evelyn to the point of readiness and acceptance of her nature -- and the two women make love. Evelyn tells herself, "Damn the will then, I don't want to be saved. I want you," as she glances down at the sleeping Ann. In this context, "damnation" (acceptance of love) reflects a "salvation" more tangible than that promised by renouncing love.

Following Evelyn's physical "surrender," Rule keeps tension alive in the novel by taking the reader inside Ann's mind, showing that she, too, must come to some acceptance of self. Ann must recognize that part of her approach to life has been a pose against true involvement and feeling. She must admit that this time her strategy of making love "to break love" (p. 142) has not succeeded. The theft of the slot machines while she is on duty shakes Ann's confidence in her ability to take charge of everything in her own world, intimates the menace beyond oneself which impinges on one's life. Still, Ann recognizes her commitment:

> She wanted to know Evelyn. She wanted to be able to love Evelyn, whatever that meant . . . . She hadn't lost the battle against tenderness. She had changed sides. And now she faced her really formidable enemies . . . . For, if she was to love Evelyn, she would have

> to fight her own damned world, and some of it she could not live without. (p. 166)

Ann does not fear the conventional morality of the world, which will disapprove of her liaison with Evelyn but, rather, the task of successfully merging her own and Evelyn's worlds, which are so disparate. In emphasizing this concern, Rule universalizes a problem facing everyone: fear of losing oneself in the powerful urge to unite with another person. Highlighting a dilemma all lovers must grapple with suggests that Ann and Evelyn are typical representatives of all lovers who both crave and fear union with another.

The Desert of the Heart loses much of its impetus and crisp style after Chapter Seven, when Rule begins to labor too hard to illustrate Ann's view of the desert and the casino. None of the devices Rule chooses to illustrate Ann's philosophy quite works: the list of quotations called from her books, the lecture Evelyn's lawyer, Arthur Williams, delivers on the evils of gambling, the meditation Evelyn indulges in as she waits for Ann at Frank's. Actually, none of these devices is necessary; Rule has already said all the reader needs to know about the differences between Ann's and Evelyn's world. It is evident that compromise is vital if their love is to endure.

Evelyn's desire to return to Pyramid Lake is based on more than just a need to be alone with Ann. She wants to confront again the place where she had been so afraid of nature. The scene is one of the most powerful in the novel and the sense of menace conveyed by the two men in the army helicopter serves as a reminder of the surveillance and judgement awaiting Ann and Evelyn in conventional society. Evelyn's anger at the intruders is based more on a

protective instinct for Ann than on fear. It is fitting that Evelyn loses her wedding ring, her last symbolic link with convention, at the lake where she has learned to recognize her own recklessness in love. Conventional morality looms large again, when Evelyn learns that jealous pique may cause Bill to talk to her husband's lawyer about her relationship with Ann, thereby complicating the divorce proceedings. Even though Bill does nothing, Evelyn knows such threats will recur:

> . . . the world would not let them alone for long. There would be other Bills, a great many more of them in Berkeley than in Reno, who, loving Ann or not, would be self-appointed judges. And few of them would be as reticent about taking action as Bill had been. They would live among an army of special assistants to the Dean who felt morally obligated to uphold that old dictum: marriage is the best life for a woman. (p. 240)

Faced with such an awareness, Evelyn decides she cannot sacrifice Ann. Her explanation is full of her old fears:

> I care what people think. I care about morality. I like to do the right thing. . . . I can't really argue about it. I know I talk in cliches. I can't help it. I feel we're wrong, Ann. It isn't right. It isn't natural. I can't go on with it. I don't want to. (p. 243)

It is a lie, Evelyn states, somewhat melodramatically, after Ann leaves. But it is not Ann's way to argue with apparent statements of fact. Evelyn's speech, prompted by misguided abnegation, might well have been uttered by Kate George, if Kate could ever bring herself to be that direct. Fortunately Evelyn comes to her senses. When she testifies in court on her own behalf, giving evidence against her husband George and the failure of her marriage, she realizes she is

speaking against herself too, against her old habit of self-protection. Her description of George becomes a sketch of the person she must not allow herself to become:

> He's bitter and despairing and frightened. He's afraid to care about anyone. He's afraid of the responsibility. Afraid of being destroyed, or afraid of destroying. He can't care about anyone. It's too much of a risk. (p. 249)

Evelyn sees she must take the risk with Ann and must risk Ann too. Neither of them can afford not to.

Kate George, however, seems to have decided early in her life that she cannot "afford" to love Esther, and she seems never to swerve from that single-minded position. Kate consciously refuses to engage in the agonizing choice between acceptance and denial: her mind focuses only upon negation. Kate tells us she sees the world in absolute terms, and cannot live with the idea that life may not always involve such well-defined choices. She recognizes her stance when she is seventeen:

> I knew what was right, and I knew I wanted to be right, and I knew I could not. Things irreconcilable have to be separated. (p. 7)

Presumably, love between Kate and Esther is an "irreconcilable" condition for Kate, who refuses direct confrontation with such possibilities. Someone less self-righteous might suggest that the seemingly irreconcilable might warrant compromise, but Kate recognizes no such half-measures. She is a character who divides herself, who will not admit certain needs vital to becoming an integrated "whole" person. Rule attempts to convince the reader that Esther is one of those denied needs:

> I wintered in California in the mild academic climate with you. I went to Europe in the summer, for a very different sort of life, which I never spoke of, and from which I only gradually recovered each fall in your company and work. (p. 8)

The reader is never given much more than a few cryptic phrases describing that "very different" life Kate pursues in the summer, but her choice of words in this quotation is interesting. She speaks of her summer activities as if they were some "sort" of shameful disease; note the negative coloration conveyed by "never spoke of" and "only gradually recovered." Before the age of twenty, Kate has begun the rigid compartmentalization of her life which she deems necessary to self-protection -- whether it is necessary to so protect Esther we never learn -- but which ultimately robs her of total self-realization.

Rule has termed This Is Not For You "the most earnest, intense of the books I've written and . . . the most tedious."[9] She makes it plain that her intention in her second novel has been to explore the heart of negation and, by ironic understatement, to suggest its failings:

> . . . the whole device is of someone talking to herself, apparently writing a letter to somebody else as a way of articulating what is otherwise silence. If you pose a problem of someone who will not communicate, you've got to find a form that will both express the refusal to say and express what hasn't been said.
> Now, in This Is Not For You, there's an awful lot that Kate never does say. So you have to work with irony. I mean she never does say she's appalled at what she has done. But over and over again, in ironies you set this up so that you know she must be appalled or she wouldn't be trying to justify. So justification becomes a tonal way of saying what isn't said.[10]

Such a construct is risky indeed, on several counts. First, because the protagonist declares herself and her intent at the outset, there is no tension to sustain the reader or to give the unfolding of the novel impetus. Second, Rule is right about the justification inherent in the narrative, but it becomes tedious after a time. The reader soon tires of Kate's repeated admission that she could not afford to love Esther any differently than she did. Even Rule herself admits:

> By the time I finished that book, I felt I had lockjaw because Kate was so tight.[11]

Evidently, Rule wanted to create a character and a novel which left the reader gasping for surcease, wanted to create the sort of psychological closeting one is glad to escape from once the last page is read. She claims:

> This Is Not For You was meant to be a stifling egotistical exercise. I mean, you were so inside Kate's head, it's awful.[12]

Well, yes. Being inside Kate's head for almost three hundred pages of self-vindicating prose is pretty awful. In that, Rule succeeds. However, she fails substantially in portraying both Kate and Esther as well-rounded, credible characters. And Rule never adequately defines either Esther's or Kate's sense of "salvation" or "damnation," a flaw particularly glaring when it comes to Esther, whose motive for joining the convent is never clearly articulated. One assumes that to Kate at least, "salvation" implies, if not sexual self-abnegation, at least renunciation of the one ruling passion of her life. Furthermore, Rule hints at, but will never allow Kate to

explore, the central tension of the novel: the conflict between Kate's sense of rightness, her apparent self-loathing, and her need to somehow resolve the two by writing her account.

One wonders if part of the problem with This Is Not For You is not the motive out of which Rule wrote it. She claims the novel

> came out of more anger than any book I've ever written. Having known an awful lot of people like Kate, intelligent, articulate and self-protective, who seemed to me very ungenerous in the way they lived.[13]

By the book's conclusion, one agrees: Kate is emotionally penurious, but then, that was evident in the first dozen pages. Part of the reader's problem with This Is Not For You is that Kate is essentially a static character who tells us much, but shows us little and who undergoes no real growth during the course of the novel. Furthermore, because everything Kate reveals about herself (and Esther) is so understated, it is difficult to ascribe motives. Why is Kate so set against loving Esther? She tells us she cannot afford to love her. Does that mean she dare not risk that kind of damnation? Or will she not love Esther because she does not regard her as an "emotional equal" and therefore sees renunciation as salvation? At various places in the novel, Rule seems to suggest all of these possibilities. It is not enough for her, as author reflecting after the fact, to say:

> I'm exploring what Kate thinks and feels. She is, after all, the child of a minister, and she has accepted a whole structure of being right. And Kate, of all my characters, has to be right. She has to cut off both feet and her nose and everything else. The church gives a definition for right. I think she's pig-headed.[14]

It is one thing for Rule to so describe Kate, and quite another for the reader to be left wondering how and why Kate got to be as "pig-headed" as Rule says she is. Rule gives us all the action through Kate's consciousness, thereby forcing upon us only one point of view, based on self-vindication.

Kate's description of the "Cain and Abel" Episcopalian service which she conducts at college prior to her graduation paints her as a truly despicable character. She has already begun to seriously question her religious commitment, but leads the service anyhow, presumably because to refuse would not look "right" and would dishonor the memory of her dead clergyman-father. She begins the hour-long ceremony in absolute cynicism:

> "Talent without discipline, courage without moral intent are deformities, not gifts," I could hear my father say, and I agreed with him; yet I very much hoped that just those deformities would carry me through the hour that was about to begin. (p. 58)

Hardly the devout attitude one expects on such an occasion! Furthermore, Kate obtains her "vengeance" upon the congregation through her choice of a responsive reading entitled "Brotherhood of Man: Cain and Abel" and then has the moral turpitude to have poor Esther read it. Kate observes:

> I had put into your mouth all that I didn't dare to say or could no longer say. You read the St. Paul passage: "Who wilt not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but wilt with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it . . ." and "for thou madest us for thyself, and our heart is restless, until it find rest in thee. . . ." (p. 60)

At this point, we find Rule close to overt clarification of Kate's

view of Esther, her love for her "little dog" and Esther's character. But then, maddeningly, Rule does not follow "teasers" with illustration. The lines Kate chooses for herself are highly suggestive:

> "Can anything clear me in my own eyes? or release me from the horror of myself? I tell you, there is no escape from God's innocence."
>
> and
>
> "We are Cain and Abel, we are the betrayer and the betrayed, gaining, with an awareness of our double nature, humility and -- perhaps -- salvation. Let us pray." (p. 60)

At this point, the frustrated reader is apt to resort to prayer as well; there seems no other way to get to the bottom of Rule's elliptical intimations. Is it too simplistic to infer from her reading that Kate does, at least at this point, acknowledge her own double nature, and realize that "salvation" comes only through self-awareness. If so, Kate is truly damned, because she continues her duplicitous way shortly thereafter. Furthermore, are we to infer that the phrase, "horror of myself" might apply to Kate's nature, her love for Esther? Rule gives us no guidance in these questions. Ultimately, one can only forward them, offer them with an apologetic shrug and move on. Rule gives us insufficient information to do more.

The problem of point of view becomes even more acute in connection with Esther Woolf: the reader must understand Esther if he or she is to make a final judgement on Kate's behavior. Was Kate selfish and emotionally niggardly or selfless and altruistic? One has only Kate's word for a guide, and it is suspect because she admits that it is her own motivation she is attempting to clarify by

writing the letter she will never mail. We know of Esther only the facts Kate allows us to know. We are at her mercy. How honest is Kate capable of being about Esther, after years of emotional dishonesty concerning her? How does the reader know that what Kate tells about her "little dog" (an odious nickname for any loved one) is indeed fact? And how can one reconcile Kate's generosity to her ailing mother with her stinginess to Esther? Rule never makes any attempt to resolve that apparent inconsistency in Kate's character. Presumably, given the format chosen for This Is Not For You, she need never do so. However, that lack of rationalization of Kate's personality is a definite weakness which grates upon the reader. Rule herself seems to realize a problem exists:

> You don't have any idea what Esther really experienced. Because one of the techniques for Kate to distance herself from that emotional requirement is to make fun of it, to show Esther as much more childish than she is, much more naive than she is . . . . If it's from Kate's point of view, and she's controlling the whole book, there's no way you could even write about what it was like for Esther.[15]

Rule here seems to be making an admission about the inherent unworkability of certain technical aspects of the novel, without offering any real hints to clarify Esther's character. And yet, throughout the novel, we do get tantalizing glimpses of Esther which suggest she might be a much "rounder" character than Kate ever allows herself to admit. We hear her asking, "Do you think I could be queer, Kate?" She tells Kate, "right at the bottom of me there's one strong word, 'yes'" and we know Kate's "bottom line" is an even stronger 'no.' It is Esther who has the courage to say

to Kate, "I think we should talk about it, just once," and it is a defiant "little dog" who defends her experimental thieving with the odious Christopher Marlowe Smith by declaiming, "morality is creative. Each of us makes his own." Such statements reveal Esther to be more courageous and more original than Kate wants to admit. Perhaps Kate must downplay Esther's individuality, in order to ease the pain of her renunciation, to make her "salvation" more palatable. Clearly, there must be more to Esther than Kate is admitting, or else she would not pose such a threat to the narrator's mental and physical equilibrium. And if we accept that Esther has far more substance than Kate gives her credit for, is it not safe to assume that Esther's decision to join the convent might have been a positive and soul-affirming move, something far closer to "salvation" than Kate's narrow-lipped self-denial?

If the conclusion of This Is Not For You leaves us bewildered about the essence of Esther's character, we have no such problem with Kate George. Her unmailed letter reveals her as an emotionally constipated and closed individual whose justification for denial is at once arrogant and smug:

> I am not guilty, and Joyce is right: it is a limited way to live. Yet I don't see how I could have afforded any other . . . If I have been incapable of loving you well enough, I've made a virtue of loving you badly. (p. 284)

Can one call such a failure a virtue? Not without a certain degree of moral myopia, as Andrew Belshaw seems to recognize when he ascertains that Kate has been in love with Esther for years. He observes:

Surely that's a failure masquerading as success. (p. 283)

Here again, the reader must grapple with another of Rule's ambiguities: does "that" refer to Kate's love for Esther, or to her success at keeping her feelings a secret? Based on Kate's ability to skirt the issue of her attraction to Esther and to secret her emotional stinginess beneath a smug cloak of self-abnegation, Andrew may be referring to both Kate's love and her secretiveness. Of all the characters in the novel, Andrew seems to recognize Kate for what she is, perhaps because he has taken the risk of loving and borne its pains. He accuses Kate of never having cared "enough about anybody to be really ugly or really beautiful." (p. 222) Kate, however, has a self-protecting response to such allegations:

> My own sins are simply the ones I can afford.
> Maybe they don't include either love or contempt.

This sort of parsimoniousness extends even to the love affairs Kate allows herself to have. What salvation is there in a view equating love, sin, and self-contempt? In the middle of her affair with Joyce, Kate confesses:

> Love is a hard word, but one can't go on being adolescently embarrassed by it. Admit it to the vocabulary at all, and it has to play some part in a lot of relationships. I told Joyce often, a dozen times a meeting, that I loved her, and I did, in a way that I could afford. I never told you. It's simple enough. I couldn't be guilty of you. I hadn't that kind of courage. (p. 195)

One wonders if Kate's problem is rooted in fearing to relinquish control of situations, as was Evelyn's. As she observes after her mother's friends, in the grips of the infirmities of age, come to visit, "Perhaps all of us have trouble admitting what we have no

control over." (p. 141)

Kate's method of dealing with Esther is never to relinquish control, always to be the stronger one, even if it means reducing Esther in doing so. In the least oblique scene in the novel, when Esther demands that they "talk about it, just once," Kate uses that tactic. To Esther's request for the truth, Kate's reply again shows arrogance:

> "I'll lie to you as long as I live, little dog, and you'll go on believing me."
> "You do love me. You do want me."
> "No."
> "Or you would have let me come to you years ago."
> "No."
> "How do I begin? Where do I touch you? Kiss you?"
> I took you in my arms to stop you, held you gently until you were a crying child to be comforted. We did talk then for an hour or more, but I didn't explain anything. We talked our way back to where we had been, simply a little more firmly established there than before. (p. 137)

Kate's tone in recounting this entire exchange is patronizing and smugly odious: she reduces Esther to the status of child, so she can "handle" her again. One imagines she does so because Esther as adult is a threat she cannot manage.

As in The Desert of the Heart, the emotional climate surrounding Esther and Kate is not hostile. In fact, many people close to Kate seem to recognize the potential in her relationship with Esther. Doris, early in the novel asks, "Are you serious about her, Kate?" Kate's response is characteristic denial: "It's nothing like that. In any case, I'm never serious about people." (p. 21) The lesbian pianist, Sandy Mentchen, is somewhat more direct. "Do you want her or don't you?" she asks. "I wouldn't even bother to ask if I couldn't

see how she feels about you. I want you to take her or let her go." (p. 52) Of course, Kate does neither, preferring to act the proverbial "dog in the manger" by showing Esther enough affection to discourage Sandy, but insufficient to serve as any sort of claim or declaration. Even Esther's formidable and disastrous mother seems to see more than Kate bargains for. She chastises Kate for not protecting Esther, following her daughter's arrest on a drug charge:

> "I'm not blind, Katherine," your mother said.
> "Haven't I made that clear from the beginning?
> She needed someone like you, someone responsible."
> (p. 188)

Of course, she's right, but that sort of responsibility is just the thing Kate is practised at evading.

In the final analysis, the most frustrating aspect of Kate's unmailed and unmailable narrative of justification is its futility. Even her victories are Pyrrhic, gained at the cost of sacrificing Esther, with no apparent benefit. Kate does recognize "how many silly years it took me to discover that I was playing my game of hide-and-seek mostly by and with myself" (p. 62) but the reader sees no possibility of her translating that awareness into action. And one wonders if she fully recognizes what her ingrained habit of holding back might have meant to Esther's life. Like Kate herself as a human being, <u>This Is Not For You</u> is a successful failure of a novel: Rule does succeed in her aim of tracing a course of denial as it erodes a character's life, but there are many branching rivulets that are never followed up. The ultimate effect upon the

reader is a frustrating, rather than a satisfactory, portrayal of the effects of denial and the price of the pursuit of stereotypic "salvation" at any cost. True, Kate is perceived as being closed in upon herself and emotionally constipated, as Rule intends, but that success is akin to Kate's moral "victory": it does not alter the basic structural flaws in the novel, does not overcome a construct which limits the reader's perspective and thus hamstrings any ability to synthesize what he or she has read, and formulate a decision about the protagonist's validity.

One need only compare the final ambiguities in This Is Not For You with the greater structural unity -- enhanced by symbolic consistency -- of The Desert of the Heart to see that the latter is a more successful novel. Perhaps the best illustration of the differences between Rule's first two novels is found in the example of fish and dog: throughout The Desert of the Heart, Ann is referred to repeatedly as "little fish"; throughout This Is Not For You, Kate calls Esther "little dog." One may find a positive connotation in the pet name "fish" if one recalls the fish as a symbol of Christ and concludes that Ann is, for Evelyn, a means to avoid the "desert of the heart" and an honest route to "salvation." One cannot, alas, make similar claims for Kate's epithet for Esther. In the end, This Is Not For You is an unsuccessful novel not because it describes negation, but because it describes negation in such an unsatisfactory fashion.

CHAPTER III

In Against the Season and The Young in One Another's Arms, Jane Rule's third and fourth novels, she moves beyond the concern of describing negative and positive views of lesbian love and emphasizes a broader human connection: the sense of community which grows between individuals who choose a form of "relatedness." Rule's middle novels have no central characters, but obtain their impetus from pivotal individuals around whom chosen "families" revolve. Despite infirmities and handicaps, such characters (Amelia Larson in Against the Season and Ruth Wheeler in The Young in One Another's Arms) draw others to them by an emotional generosity and human tenderness more binding than blood ties. Both Against the Season and The Young in One Another's Arms are written from an omniscient narrator's viewpoint, thus eliminating the reader's sense of having the action filtered through the ego of a central character. Such an omniscient narrator enables Rule to describe many different characters with equal intensity. Rule's emphasis upon voluntary community and shared lives amplifies the themes hinted at in her first two novels. Ruth Wheeler's boarding house for youthful strays is an enlargement of the idea behind Frances Packer's half-way house for soon-to-be divorced women: Amelia Larson's generous well-spring of love and her sense of emotional community is hinted at in Doris, Kate George's gregarious half-sister.

It seems that in Against the Season and The Young in One Another's Arms, Rule is branching out from a discussion of love

between couples to a broader-based concept of loving shared by disparate human beings who feel the need to create a new community within a community. In both these novels, many unlikely individuals find themselves becoming not just bed-fellows but soul-mates. Lesbian love is no longer a focus, but merely one option among several different relationships: loving, or rather, whom one loves, appears to bear no connection to such social accidents as birth or shared blood. Sometimes even marriage, itself a chosen alliance, does not deliver love. Rule's "families" in her middle novels are often not at all formally related. Groups of people -- sometimes with common views and needs, sometimes at odds with each other -- find themselves sharing lives, living space or both. This theme of adopted family is as central to Rule's work as are her portrayals of lesbian lovestyles. The creation of a family of supportive human beings to meet one's social needs is certainly a philosophy she has long espoused in both her own writing and her commentary on life and art.

Rule's remarks about her method in Against the Season reveal that she has reached a point in her development where she wants to pursue novels "not controlled by one sensibility;"[1]

> I did a lot of perfectly ordinary technical things in Against the Season that I had never done before. It was brand new for me, it was very "experimental" for me, though recognizable in every Tom, Dick and Harry's novel. I have gone on from there to a notion that, if I'm going to go on writing novels, I've got to develop the way to write about community that interests me and it will start with this very conventional exercise in shifting point of view to a statement about the way I think people live in the world. Nobody is a main character. We are all parts of a whole structure. And the novel of one sensibility or two begins to feel to me a terrible ego-pressure.[2]

In Against the Season, Rule draws us into the community through an omniscient narrator who plays no games with us, tells us what we need to know and gives us similar types and amounts of information about all the major characters. Thus we feel as strongly attached to Carl as we do to Agate; we are as concerned about Harriet and Peter as we are about Dina and Rosemary. Because Rule plays no "favorites," all characters seem an integral part of the community Amelia draws around her. Community thus is given an unspoken definition of "mutual sharing." Against the Season, then, is a turning point in Rule's fiction. Hitherto, she has been interested in two main protagonists (Evelyn and Ann) or in the world as seen through one character's consciousness (Kate). In her third and fourth novels, she wants to depict a world of shared vision where several characters share the same space in a novel, with no one necessarily the hero or the heroine. Certainly, this artistic ploy is a commentary on life itself in which, if one considers the larger world outside one's self, it is indeed true that "nobody is a main character." This philosophy of shared world, shared space, recurs as the thematic underpinning of Rule's third through fifth novels.

Against the Season also shows Rule's altered stance on the position of lovers within society. In The Desert of the Heart, Evelyn and Ann are conscious of their positions within society as women, and on the fringe of society as lesbians, and struggle with the knowledge of how that society might judge their choices. Although both women are committed to certain involvements with society -- Ann with making social commentary through her cartoons and

her foster children, Evelyn with her teaching and her academic criticism -- Rule's first novel offers no strong sense of the women's place in some larger, more organic type of community-within-a-community. Frances Parker's boarding house hints at such a chosen society of women with shared interests, but the characters' liaison is only accidental and short-term. Oddly enough, although primarily a novel of negation and denial, This Is Not For You gives a better sense of Rule's emerging philosophy of chosen community. Kate's circle of friends is in many ways a community, emotionally supportive and capable of enduring the passage of time and the many vicissitudes of its members. When Esther leaves the secular world to join her convent, the reader senses she leaves behind a family of friends who will forever feel diminished by her absence. Rule elaborates upon such chosen relationships in her later novels, and has talked at length of the necessity for new allegiances to replace the changing ideas about "family ties":

> We can now choose whether or not to make commitments. The minute you introduce choice, where a woman doesn't have to marry to leave home and lead her own life, a man doesn't have to marry for him to have an economic unit that's viable for him to run the farm. Men and women don't have to have children; they don't have to take care of their parents -- there's social security. We don't have to do anything.
> The minute you take away that simply expected role in human relationships then stand with someone else, with other people and think -- why, why are all of the questions of personal differences, of personal need which were minimal in a society that required relationship, why are these questions now our maximum concerns? No wonder, not only my characters, but people we all know, live together rather than marry; put off having children, maybe decide not to; move two thousand to five thousand miles away from their parents; lose track of their brothers and sisters. Why care? Nine times out of ten there's a real answer. But it's a hard answer and it means a lot of voluntary risk.[3]

Voluntary risk, Rule suggests, is the answer to the rootlessness of urbanized society, to the break-down of the extended family, to the need for outside influences aside from the nuclear family. People need to need one another, she implies. Certainly, voluntary risk is what most of the characters in Against the Season ultimately recognize as a worthwhile investment.

Where does Rule's broadened view of relationships leave her lesbian characters? Has she abandoned her interest in "normalizing" lesbian relationships in fiction? I think not, and in this chapter will attempt to illustrate the ways in which Rule's shifted focus serves to validate the sapphic love portrayed by making it function as an integral, and accepted, part of a larger community wherein people relate to each other in the way in which family members traditionally rallied together for a common cause. The leap from choosing a love object outside the social mores of "acceptable" pairing to choosing an adopted community is a natural one for Rule to make, given her views that human love may have many forms of expression, and that the form one chooses is a matter of personal selection:

> The novel has importantly dealt with families, with the structures of a small town where you really inherit your concerns and your cares. But most of us have moved into an urban world where we leave our families behind and where we leave the small town or farm values behind . . . . What interests me is watching people detached from all these requirements, figuring out ways to build a human community that is satisfying and nourishing to them. I am often concerned with voluntary relationships, with the choice. Because I think that's where we are . . . . We still want human community and we create it in all sorts of different ways.[4]

Including clearly lesbian alliances in the voluntary human communities she creates is Rule's method of indicating she sees no basic difference between the motivation for heterosexual or homosexual affection. Against the Season is the first novel in which Rule gives the reader a picture of homosexual characters (whether male or female) totally integrated with the surrounding society. Such characters may have personal problems, but there is no suggestion of their being beyond the pale of society's embrace. They are a clearly-defined part of a larger community in which they live and to which they contribute. None of the homosexual characters in either Against the Season or The Young in One Another's Arms spends time agonizing; in fact, the latter novel gives us, in the form of Boy Wonder, one of the most sanguine and blatantly frank gay characters in modern fiction. Such a total integration of homosexual characters is not a situation all reviewers greet happily. In an interview, Rule has remarked that the "most hostile reviews" her work has engendered were for Against the Season, "which is the gentlest of the [her first three] books and certainly doesn't deal with lesbians as a basic theme."[5] Rule has her own theories about the reasons for such hostile reviews:

> Two characters in the book happen to be lesbians. They also happen to be a social worker and a furniture mender. I think the hostility to the book was that those people were included in an ordinary world. There is a moral offense that some people feel and want to respond to. . . . there's this terrible fear that if you allow this kind of relationship in the ordinary world, it's like pesticide. It's going to kill all fertility, wreck our world, threaten the patriarchal structure. The gentler it is, apparently the more threatening it is.[6]

Although Dina and Rosemary's relationship is not without its problems, it is certainly as potentially happy as that of, say, Peter Fallidon and Harriet Jameson. And it is certainly less oppressive and negative than the bitter cup shared by Grace and Feller Hill. Rule refuses to romanticize Dina and Rosemary's relationship: she paints it as no more perfect or more desirable than any of the novel's heterosexual couplings.

Rule claims that part of her purpose in Against the Season is to challenge stereotypes about age, and how people of a certain age should think or act:

> I wanted to very gently breal some of the clichés about old age, about youth, about middle age. Many of those characters are in situations that you usually associate with certain age groups. Old people don't propose to each other. Young people aren't reasonable and sensible.[7]

Again, this statement reveals a broader fictional intention on Rule's part: she wants to topple the stereotype of lesbians as bizarre people stranded outside of society's mainstream, but she also wants to force the reader to stop and look again at people of all ages. When Ida begins to see the possible joy in Carl's marriage proposal, the reader is expected to infer that there is no fixed "season" on needs for companionship and love. When Agate and Cole do not behave like typical youngsters in the throes of "puppy love," the possibility of youthful wisdom -- or at least restraint -- is suggested.

Overt commentary upon society -- Amelia's, Peter's and Harriet's discussion about whether greed makes or kills a town, for instance

-- is more restrained and light-handed than were the essays on gambling and the desert in The Desert of the Heart. Rule handles the information-giving in Against the Season in a conversational style, having one character voice issues as a natural part of a discussion. When Rosemary visits Ida just after Carl's death, she reacts to the old woman's statement that the situation between herself and Carl was "never anything serious" by confessing her own love for Dina. Rosemary is angered by Ida's denial, and upset by her apparent shame at having felt love stir at her age:

> Rosemary wanted to shout at Ida, wanted to make her confess, for surely she had loved Beatrice, been in love with her but had never said, never done anything
> . . . .
> "Ida, I'm in love with Dina Pyros."
> Ida sighed. "Yes, I supposed you were."
> "Is it ridiculous? Is it so ridiculous?"
> "Yes," Ida said. "It can't ever be anything else." (p. 167)

Here Rule uses Ida to comment upon the whole human condition, upon humanity's picayune efforts to shape a statement from life. The novelist is concerned with the need for human commitment as well as the essential inexplicable impulse to love. Rosemary's response, "I don't really care," is the antithesis of its apparent meaning: Rosemary does care, she has examined her life, found it lacking in caring and has decided to take the risk of commitment. She is not apologetic about it, as is Ida. What Rosemary has decided not to care about is looking ridiculous. After revealing herself to Dina by stating her need, she has found a strength in honest self-knowledge. Earlier, the essential ridiculousness of human affairs is revealed in Carl's and Ida's conversation:

> "There is something faintly ridiculous about any relationship that's a matter of choice," Ida said.
> She and Carl were sitting out on Ida's front terrace, watching the late sun on the sea.
> "Essentially ridiculous," Carl said. "And what relationship isn't a matter of choice?"
> "Blood relationships."
> "Do you think so Amelia and Beatrice didn't have to live together."
> "No, but they didn't have to decide to in any public sort of way either. Why essentially ridiculous?"
> "Because what we need of each other is, I suppose," Carl said.
> "What I need is to look proud rather than foolish."
> "And surely that's ridiculous?"
> "I suppose so, but there it is." (p. 122)

There it is indeed. The basic dilemma humans face in reaching out to others is the conflict between their need for self-abandonment, their desire to see themselves reflected in another's eyes, and their need to remain whole, surrender nothing and avoid looking foolish. This terse exchange between the thoughtful old couple as they look out to sea (a symbol of life's voyage, a pun on the need to <u>see</u> truth?) is one of Rule's best pieces of dialogue in <u>Against the Season</u>. Carl and Ida's conversation is brief but not cryptic, evocative but not over-written and, best of all, takes the reader from consideration of the couple's particular situation to a broader understanding of a more generalized human situation. In this brief exchange, Rule conveys both her interest in, and hope for, voluntary human community without resorting to essays or lectures.

Even as self-tramelling a couple as Peter and Harriet reach a point of daring to care, of not caring (or, at least, of risking beyond appearances) about how ridiculous they might look in their urge for a middle-aged marriage. Peter's realization that he cares for Harriet more than he realizes goes against all the fastidious

self-protective armour he's previously donned. Given their limitations and frailties, both Peter and Harriet emerge as courageous because they attempt to overcome the habit of not caring by replacing it with the risky proposition of commitment. Certainly, Harriet's declaration over tuna fish sandwiches is evidence of more spunk than one expects in so cautious a woman:

> I think what I want to say," Harriet continued carefully, feeling oddly calm, "is a warning. I know you don't want to love me. I do want to love you, and I'm going to try. I don't mean I'm going to try to seduce you. I'd be too embarrassingly bad at it. I'm simply going to go ahead and worry about you when I feel like it." (p. 118)

For a woman as restrained as Harriet, that mild manifesto is a declaration of passion and is encouragement enough to cause Peter to examine the value of trading isolation for involvement. Carl's sudden death at a stoplight makes Peter all too aware of his own mortality and shocks him into the realization that he'd "rather" care than not, "that there are worse things than worrying," (p. 170) and those things are not worrying and not having anyone to worry about.

The similarities between the love affair of Peter and Harriet and that of Dina and Rosemary reflect the ease with which Rule links one set of relationships with another to strengthen the sense of community described by the novel and to underline the unity of the work itself. In both cases, the lovers must shed protective armour to engage in a relationship. Dina's self-protection is symbolized by the layers of clothing she seems "to wear in all seasons" just as Rosemary Hopwood has learned to protect herself behind her white

smile and her practised social worker's distance from emotional involvement. Both women must learn to shed such protective devices before there can be room in their lives for loving. Rosemary is the first to capitulate and express her need, but Dina, the apparently more sexually-generous of the two, resists spiritual or bodily integration with another person. Dina is not in the habit of letting her guard down or allowing the women in her life to become more than objects whose bodies she tends as she would damaged furniture. When Rosemary confesses, "I've loved you for six years," Dina responds authoritatively, as lover, but resists surrendering herself and will not become the object of someone else's attentions. Nor will Dina initiate encounters:

> Rosemary had known, from the moment she left Dina with Cole, that there would be no telephone calls unless Rosemary made them, that there would be no further encounters unless Rosemary presented herself for that purpose. And even if she did, she was not sure Dina would be so hospitable again. (p. 45)

Rosemary's own need of Dina, her own rash declaration of love has left her abashed:

> For she only wished that she could not imagine herself, having said what she had said, phoning Dina, going to Dina, pounding down the door to say, "I don't love you, I don't even know you. I don't care how little interest you have in me. I don't care how aloof you stay from me. Just take me." Rosemary Hopwood, who had always been pursued, who had always been circumspect, "socially and emotionally impeccable!" a lover had once shouted against her pride and self-control, had to stop imagining herself capable of what she had already done. (p. 47)

Like Ida, Rosemary is appalled by the ridiculousness of human love and need. Unlike Ida, she has already relented, has surrendered her aloof, dignified stance. Ironically, in the throes of a state of

"menopause as pure lechery," Rosemary looks forward to a calming dinner with Ida, [illegible]ho has served Rosemary as a model of self-sufficiency all her life," unaware that Ida is struggling with her own demons as a result of Carl's proposal.

In the portrayal of Dina, the grey-eyed Greek, and the dancing sailors at Nick's Cafe, Rule telescopes myth and poetry with echoes of classical Greece's emphasis upon and acceptance of homosexuality as an admirable expression of love.[8] After reading the first love scene between Rosemary and Dina, one cannot help making connections between the myth of Diana and Actaeon and certain lines of Sappho's surviving poetry. In Greek mythology, Diana, the huntress queen, virginal moon goddess, turns the youthful Actaeon into a stag when he surprizes her naked during her toilette.[9] Like Diana, Dina is concerned with retaining her sexual integrity, with self-protection, and resists being loved although she will give others pleasure. After she makes love to Rosemary, Dina spurns her offer of reciprocity, saying something which seems inexplicable without reference to myth: "A Greek, to marry well, must be a virgin." (p. 31) Aloof, like the mythic Diana, Dina will engage in love-making only on her own terms, will not reveal her inner self and shies away from self-surrender. When Dina first makes love to Rosemary, it is utterly on her own terms: Dina is in control, Rosemary is left naked while Dina is "still in her boots, lined jeans, and large, obscuring sweater." The implication is that Dina has been untouched by the experience, her technical chastity is still intact, while Rosemary has been transformed:

> The curling, tangled hair, the dark, desiring eyes, the full, so beautifully used mouth belonged to a younger face, one she had not seen since she had come home, defeated, six years ago. There was no vanity in her pleasure, simply wonder. The robe was red silk. Rosemary put it on without thinking about it, without wondering who had worn it the night before, or the night before that. (p. 30)

The significance of nudity and clothing, the revelation and the hidden, functions potently, although in an understated fashion, in this section of Against the Season. One finds a parallel in one of Sappho's fragments, wherein a loved one's apparel functions as a powerful symbol of the abnegation of self during the height of romantic infatuation:

> Come hither tonight I pray, my rosebud Gongyla, and with your Lydian lute; surely a desire of my heart ever hovers about your lovely self; for the sight of your very robe thrills me, and I rejoice that it is so.[10]

In Dina, however, Rosemary meets someone far stronger than a mere "rosebud" subject to ravishing. Rule's handling of Dina's insistence on virginity is not convincing. Since Dina is a taciturn character who does not even explain herself in interior monologues, readers share Rosemary's confusion at Dina's resistance to active passion. She is a woman out of place, born in Greece, raised in Chicago, unable to understand her mother's tongue but not at home in North American society, a woman for whom English is a "second" language but who has no first. Although Rosemary thinks Dina's stance of "dowered virginity" is ludicrous (p. 79), she accepts that she is now the one who, because she has given up her own passive stance, can be seen as the fool. Carl's death forces Rosemary to

re-examine her habit of non-involvement and find it insufficient:

> Rosemary wanted no defense. Why couldn't she say to Dina, "I'm no more tired of being loved than breathing in. It's just that I want to breathe out. Reach out, before it happens again, before I stand there uncommitted at the crisis, and let you walk away, or walk away myself." (p. 175)

As much as one approves of Rosemary's recognition of the need for human intercourse, one questions her action. Her response is to go to Dina in the night, take command of her drunk lover and force Dina to acknowledge "the pain of her own desire." Rosemary forces herself upon Dina because she needs to act out her own recognition of her commitment to a relationship, but one wonders at her method. Is force a way to found a relationship? Besides, is not Rosemary's victory somewhat Pyrrhic? Dina does "what people want," but does so in such a way as never to risk her own separateness. Rule leaves the relationship between Dina and Rosemary essentially unresolved while the two women grapple with their own antithetical needs for identity and fusion. Perhaps this abeyance is wise, since it approximates the unresolved tension between these opposite human impulses.

The Greek sailors who come to dance and strut their sexual virtuosity at Nick's symbolize the same antipodal urges inherent in love -- the need to see oneself reflected in another's eyes as opposed to being the beholder of a loved one; the need to make a statement about life by dancing alone versus the desire to dance for someone, as a way of communicating, or with someone, as a way of touching; the desire for entity versus the need for fusion. When, at the novel's end, Dina dances for everyone at Nick's, her performance is both a statement and a warning:

> . . . people called to Dina for a solo, and at last she did dance the formal inventions that require strength and control and a sense of spatial isolation. Rosemary admired the performance but saw in it the absolute distance of Dina from anyone who threatened that space. Inviolate dancer against the pink and mutilated gods. (p. 207)

Unlike the armless, flesh-colored representations of Greek myth adorning the restaurant walls, Dina is untouched by others, protected within her own myth of individuality which she weaves like a curtain between herself and others who would approach her. However, the dancing at Nick's has another dimension as well -- that of invitation, of suggestion. The dancers also perform for those they wish to impress or please, When Cole dances with the young Greek, Panayotis, it represents his response to an invitation to life and symbolizes his readiness to engage with others just as the male Greek dancers' motions are both hymn to life and boast of their own virility. Peter, although he attracts the dancers' attention as one to impress, is still pursuing his stance as self-designated wallflower beholding the dance of life, and prefers to be a spectator:

> So Cole and Panayotis were dancing again, a competitive dance for the attention of their father, who had refused to father anyone. Still he was chosen. Panayotis, growing proud of the grace of this tall, fair, foreign boy, became teasingly, lewdly seductive. As Cole turned free into a step of his own, Panayotis leapt suddenly and caught himself with knees clenched around Cole's rib cage, the shouts of the crowd covering Cole's own cry of surprise, but he held his balance until Panyotis dropped back. (p. 98)

The energy, the subliminal homosexuality implied by the dance, mirrors the struggle in Cole's own life as he attempts to discern

his sexual identity just as Peter's refusal to dance represents his own habit of non-involvement.

Of all the characters in Against the Season, only Carl and Amelia seem truly at ease in the habit of loving. For them both, Carl as a retired minister, Amelia as the informal manageress of a home for unwed mothers, loving is a natural activity which engages one's full energies; it is not a responsibility to be fended off. Rule depicts Amelia as "not of a temperament for solitude" (p. 6) and as one "prepared simply to accept: love, death, a hot day." (p. 33) For Carl, loving has in many ways always been part of his profession. He tells Ida:

> 'Love' is an easy word for me. I mean by it all kinds of very ordinary needs and pleasures. I mean by it admiration and affection. (p. 39)

That statement sounds very much like the philosophy of the author herself, who refuses to limit loving to a particular orientation or relationship.

Coming after the claustrophobia of This Is Not For You and the occasional clutter of The Desert of the Heart, Against the Season is a charmingly "open" novel. In it, Rule avoids the lecture on society found in passages of her first novel and the limited insight dictated by the format of her second. In Against the Season, she employs dialogue and irony to good effect. Furthermore, there is a tension between readers' expectations about characters and the independent development of those characters, who often act against their "season" of life. Rule's third novel manages to be at once hopeful and realistic, even though Amelia and Carl, the

novel's two wisest and most generous-spirited characters, die. In Against the Season, characters do learn about themselves, do dare to take emotional risks and make offers of love. However, no one is expected to grow beyond his own capability and no one is pushed to lengths that make his personality seem unrealistic or falsely heroic. They all remain, whatever their failings and insights, ordinary people attempting to do their best in life. Rule's restraint in this respect is perhaps best epitomized by her portrayal of Cole. The awkward twenty-year-old matures a great deal during the novel, but still remains himself: uncertain, fumbling and afraid, but striving to overcome his handicaps of youth and inexperience. Cole sees the error of his romantic gesture of wanting to marry Agate, he accepts his mixed feelings about his own sexuality and he begins to forgive Peter for showing human flaws. Cole has learned to cope with the awesomeness of birth through his relationship with Agate; he must also accept Amelia's imminent death. Rule leaves no doubt that, although he may stumble occasionally, Cole will eventually participate, if not always flawlessly, at least with integrity, in the dance of life.

The felicity of restraint and shattered stereotypes so evident in Against the Season, is far less apparent in Rule's fourth novel. When considered four years after publication, The Young in One Another's Arms seems more dated and sentimental, and less focused and controlled, than at earlier readings. In this novel too, Rule pursues her idea of voluntary community, but the community described is less credible than that of Against the Season. Here

again, there are no principal characters, but Ruth Wheeler emerges as a central motivating or catalytic character. The novel's main problem lies in the connection between Ruth, herself a well-executed and believable character, and the other characters in the novel. Many of the inhabitants of The Young in One Another's Arms seem almost stock, stereotypic creations, Willard the Dullard, Flighty Joanie who finds joy in hair curlers and backseats, Tom the Sensitive Draft-Dodger, Mavis the Controlled Academic, Gladys the Free-loving Firebrand. Admittedly, such a summation is somewhat unfair to the aforementioned characters, each of whom at times has an engaging role to play in the novel, but there is still a feeling of "vehicle" about them in many scenes, particularly with respect to Willard and Joanie, each of whom seems designed to illustrate another aspect of Ruth's forbearance. While Rule's sincerity and her humanism shine through in this novel, some of the situations she invents waver perilously close to a kind of mawkish sentimentality she has hitherto avoided.

Ruth Wheeler, like Amelia Larson, provides the impetus for the interaction between all other major characters in The Young in One Another's Arms and provides the focus for the unfolding of the novel. Just as she drew upon Greek mythology in Against the Season, Rule here fuses her storyline to Biblical myth with the allusion to the story of Ruth and Naomi. The Book of Ruth tells the story of the dutiful and devoted daughter-in-law who refuses to leave her mother-in-law, Naomi:

> Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and

> where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people and thy God my God . . . .[11]

Ruth and Clara Wheeler have a strong relationship which survives the periodic intrusion of Hal, Ruth's husband and Clara's bastard son. Rule depicts the understanding between Ruth and Clara as something beyond Hal's bumbling, aggressive ken, something which, in its subtlety, has always eluded his understanding. Ruth sometimes muses about her relationship with Clara, thinking, "Did many women marry because they loved their mothers-in-law?" (p. 6) Although lesbian literature contains some discussion about whether there was anything covertly homosexual in Ruth and Naomi's relationship,[12] no conclusions are offered and Rule's novel concurs in its ambiguity. Clara at one point confesses that she didn't want to leave Ruth when Hal returned from the war:

> "That [Hal's return] didn't last long, did it?" Ruth asked, smiling.
> "Nearly three years. Do you remember that awful woman, my landlady? 'Clara Wheeler, it's a mistake to come between your son and his wife.'"
> "And you said, 'I don't come between. I come before and after. He says he doesn't want her. I do.'"
> "Was I as outspoken as that?"
> "Yes, you were, and she said, 'It's unnatural!,' and then and there we had to find another place to live." (p. 79)

Rule leaves it at that. Although the suggestion of Clara "wanting" Ruth is strong, Rule follows it with nothing more substantive. The reader is left wondering if there ever has been a time when Clara and Ruth's contact has gone beyond the platonic. Certainly, Ruth's dedication to Clara is sincere, as is witnessed by her anger when Hal suggests her caring for his mother has been the discharging of a duty and nothing more. Whatever the depth of their bond, Ruth and

Clara seem to be essential to each other's completion:

> Ruth and Clara said not one word to each other after that. They watched Gladys amble away down the beach, then break into an easy run. Then they turned to the large view of the sea, the mountains and the sky. Ruth did not have to say, I wasn't much good with them alone. They need both of us. And I need you. As long as you're here, nothing will fall apart. That's silly, I know. I mean, I won't fall apart. The song of contentment she felt was a melody so familiar between them they had only to be still to listen to it. (p. 149)

Certainly that passage, with its Yeatsian undertones, implies a bond of deep content and belonging between the two women, as well as an inter-dependence, but one wonders why Rule is not more specific regarding its status. Perhaps she wishes to imply a strong attraction between the two women, as certainly occurs in real life, but an attraction that is emotional rather than physical.

There is definitely nothing ambiguous in Rule's portrayal of Boy Wonder, who is what she calls a "holiday character" and the "most bad mouthing character I've ever created."[13] Boy is as outspoken about his homosexuality as he is about his color. The latter cannot be ignored, but he makes a point of flaunting the former. Boy begins his stay at Ruth's house by poking fun at himself, claiming his name is merely, "Boy."

> "No mother of yours ever named you that, come on," Ruth said. "She named me Boyd, which is either a feathered creature who can fly -- and I don't fly -- or the past tense of Boy -- and I thanks be to sweet Jesus, ain't past tense yet. This way, everybody knows my name. I don't even usually have to tell them, lady." (p. 83)

It doesn't take long for Boy to declare himself sexually, either, in a dinner-table statement which links an awareness of politics, sexuality and racism.

> Sociological context is all-important, honey, if you and I are going to understand each other at all . . . Now, I'm a sort of James Baldwin reactionary, born too late for my style, a faggoty little nigger making up to white boys; so I got to come to a backward country like Canada where there's enough social lag for me to survive. I mean, you want to be nice to me, don't you? Tom here does, too. He wants to be my friend, and so this here is a tree I can swing in. They cut all that kind down by now in my native land, and that's the truth. I mean, I've only been in Canada a week, and the guilt here is just unreal, and you hardly got no niggers to make up to. (p. 86)

Boy wonder has the system accurately analyzed: knowing that he is twice-damned in being both black and gay, he deduces that he has a better chance of acceptance and "physical salvation" in Canada where, because people won't want to appear racists, tolerance will extend to his homosexuality as well. Boy is as outspoken about his sexual needs as he is deft at self-parody. He answers questions about his destination of an evening with a simple, "To get laid, but I'll be home for cocoa." (p. 98) thereby fusing lust with innocence in a quite disarming fashion. Boy seems totally without complication as far as his sexual needs are concerned, prompting the repressed Mavis to observe, "I wish it were as simple as that for me . . . if it is simple for him." The reader wonders that, too. With Boy, one never knows; Rule relies on irony and understatement to imply deeper truths about Boy and to suggest the basic decency beneath his smart-talking facade. He leaves the Wheeler "family" as abruptly as he joined it, heading east when it becomes apparent the police know of his illegal presence in the country. His legacy is the warmth he leaves behind him, the courage he gives Mavis to be more open about herself and the black compatriot he sends to Ruth,

Rule is off-handed in introducing the triangle that develops between Tom, Gladys and Mavis, once again suggesting rather than explaining, sketching rather than portraying, that relationships can be multifarious. It is Tom who explains the new arrangement to Ruth, and the reader isn't allowed much more opportunity for surprize than she is:

> ". . . If Mavis does get a job, I'm not sure Gladdy wouldn't go with her."
> "With Mavis?"
> "They sort of . . . got it together, you know, while I was in the hospital."
> "Mavis?"
> "They've always mattered a lot to each other and I guess women know how to need each other in certain ways. Mavis is a special person for me, too. I don't know where Boy and I get the idea that friendship and sex don't mix, gay or straight. The only difference between Boy and me is that I want some kind of commitment. It's not that I want to be possessive, really, but I don't think Mavis wants to be just part of our lives, or maybe she's afraid of it. I can't talk to her now. If she does come along, I'm going to look like a man with a harem when really Mavis and I are part of Gladdy's . . . ." (p. 137)

Gladys, with her innate sexuality and her emotional impetuosity, is clearly the sexual magnet within the family, just as Ruth and, to a certain extent, Clara, are the elements of wisdom and stability. However, Rule suggests that acceptance of shared relationships is not as simple in practice as it seems in theory, or so Tom's attempted rape of Mavis would imply. Again, though, Rule's intent is overly-subtle. Does Tom attack Mavis out of pent-up male hostility, out of mad grief at the death of his son or because he resents sharing Gladys with her? Tom never says, and neither does Rule. Are we left to assume a combination of all three factors drove this apparently-peace-loving young man to violence? Here again is

a case where Rule could afford to be a little more directive, if only for the reader's need for clarity. Rule does offer one passage of explanation, which is not very hopeful of a new ordering of relationships between men and women:

> If anyone had ever suggested that Tom might one day lose his considerable but carefully controlled temper, let out all that anger and frustration and grief he'd tried so hard to heal in himself instead, Ruth would automatically have feared for Gladys, whom he needed to be so much surer of than he was or perhaps ever would be. It was really Gladys he had attacked this morning, the bitch, the witch, Woman, who would not finally ever give, give in, give up, who threatened the centre of him, who killed his child. Ruth was not afraid he would hurt anyone else now, but she was afraid of his suffocating in the stench of his own anger. (p. 163)

Even in a household as liberated as Ruth's, it seems the eternal battle of the sexes still simmers beneath the surface of understanding and acceptance. This menace, this sense of order on the brink of eruption or collapse, underlies the entire plot of The Young in One Another's Arms.

One of Rule's preoccupations in her fourth novel is the changing of the old order, the sense of a weakening of society's centre. The infringement of high-rise development on Ruth's old neighborhood, the changes in the face of her city, Willard's misguided attempt to protest change and the subsequent violence with the police and the police surveillance (again, by helicopter) of the group's cafe, illustrate the sense of disorder pervading the social order. Ruth herself feels akin to the narrator in Yeats' "Sailing to Byzantium": that hers is "no country for old men" or for aging women either. The novel explores the tension between the

need for change, to revitalize ailing institutions, and the destructiveness of change, which alters one's surroundings and often razes the worthwhile in pursuit of progress of dubious quality. And yet, while Ruth resents having to move, and thinks an approach to a new bridge is a poor exchange for her street of comfortable lived-in houses, she is not one to fight progress. Her way of dealing with change is to adapt to it by taking in the human debris brought to her door by the conflict between the impulse to change and the implacability of established order. Rule's suggestion seems to be that only through individual integrity can one resist, in however small a fashion, society's current impulse towards dehumanized response.

In The Young in One Another's Arms, Rule completes her shift in focus from individual relationships to a broader concern with how individuals live within society, and how they render a portion of that society habitable through chosen community. Here, her discussion of homosexual relationships is firmly rooted in their connection to a larger association of individuals. Homosexual characters, whether male or female, do not exist as outcasts or isolates but share lives and aspirations with others. In her fourth novel, Rule's concern with sexual politics is still evident, although so subtly handled that it is part of the undercurrent rather than an evident aspect of the novel's superstructure. Her more obvious concern is how man and woman ought to live in an increasingly urbanized world which minimizes human contact. The old way, as symbolized by Hal, of conquering everyone and everything, is

rejected in favor of a more tolerant, co-operative approach where individuals acknowledge and respect each other's differences. Inherent in that approach is acceptance of women as equals and acknowledgement of human beings' different impulses for loving. In all such respects, the philosophy of The Young in One Another's Arms is admirable. However, one wishes that, in presenting such "hard" issues, Rule did not so often go "soft" in avoiding emphatic statements about characters' motivations. It seems that she is attempting to do the impossible: write a prescriptive novel about the ills of modern society but at the last minute shying away from diagnosing what interpretation one must make of such ills. Again, one appreciates her avoidance of the didactic, but clarity need not be so interpreted. In one other area only is The Young in One Another's Arms disappointing, but that, perhaps is not Rule's fault: because of its use of characters who are "sixties types" the novel seems dated, seems to be making points about a time no longer pertinent. Perhaps the only way Rule could have avoided this problem would have been to strengthen characters like Tom and Gladys so that they are broader in concept and more universal than the symbols of disaffected youth they so clearly seem to be. Perhaps the pitfall of Rule's interest in presenting novels of "no central character" is that the reader is left regarding all protagonists as slighter than the author intended them to be.

CHAPTER IV

Jane Rule's fifth and most recent novel represents the culmination of her gradual move away from an examination of the concerns of a single protagonist to a consideration of the individual's place within, and responsibility to, a broader human community. In Contract with the World, Rule creates a community-within-a-community, in which eight individuals become enmeshed in a circle of friends and a variety of relationships. Old alliances shift and fall away as characters undergo growth and change. Rule conveys the effect the members of the smaller community have upon each other as well as the influence exerted by the surrounding society upon the individuals within the circle of friends. Readers thus must examine the effects of such influences upon the individual as Rule draws them into the shifting allegiances and sexual ties reflected in her characters' lives.

Of the eight characters who form the focus of Contract with the World, half are decidedly artistic, earning livings in the fields of art, music or photography. In this novel Rule for the first time engages in an extended discussion of the roles art and the artist play within society, much of which reflects her own revealed sensibilities on that subject, some of which does not. The "family of friends" Rule depicts in Contract with the World consists of both heterosexual and homosexual pairings, some of which change radically in nature during the course of the novel. This fifth novel is the first to directly confront the clash between the

homosexual and the heterosexual world, and the first since The Desert of the Heart where a character engages in lengthy rumination about adjusting to a homosexual proclivity. In allowing Alma an examination of her own attitudes toward being lesbian, Rule breaks new ground and explores such contemporary issues as gay power and sexual harassment. For three hundred pages, Rule masterfully portrays the lives of eight interacting characters who evoke both curiosity and concern as they struggle to make sense of their place in the world. However, at the last minute, with the ineptly-handled riot at Carlotta's art exhibition, Rule undermines the implication of the altercation between Carlotta and her circle of friends and the outraged citizens of Surrey. The art gallery fracas, where Carlotta's paintings are defaced by red paint, destroys the uneasy truce Rule has achieved within the novel between the homosexual and heterosexual sensibilities. Rule's haste to render the situation humorous and her need to bundle the main characters into the paddy wagon suggest a reluctance to confront any of the issues she has just raised about art, morality and sexuality. Rule appears unable to play the scene unleavened by humor, but there is a flatness to her resolution. Given the preceding serious examination of sexual affinity, and society's continued concern about such matters, the humor tends to reduce rather than lighten the novel's concluding passages. The reader feels somehow cheated and disappointed by Rule's shying away from a dramatic, hard-hitting conclusion which might function as both revelation of, and commentary upon, the complexity of contemporary sexual problems. Segments of Contract with the World are both

humorous and engaging, but the serious social issues it raises deserve a final disposition unhindered by trivialization.

In Contract with the World, as in Against the Season and The Young in One Another's Arms, Rule concentrates upon a group of protagonists, none of whom can be said to be more central than any of the others. Indeed, the relationship between the eight friends assumes its own form and proportions early in the novel, and functions almost as a "character" itself as the action progresses. Sexual politics -- that is, the resolution of one's attitude towards sexuality, and one's understanding of the dynamics of any relationship with others -- is a major concern of most of the characters in the novel. Even though her protagonists have demanding interests and careers, much of their energy and subsequent success (or lack of it) in life seems to depend upon their sorting out their sexual orientation and finding rewarding relationships. Furthermore, Rule portrays the relationships which develop within the circle of friends as being gratifying in different ways: people bring to and get from each other different strength and support. Despite its lack of a single protagonist, Contract with the World, like Rule's two preceding novels, does have a central character essential to the unfolding of events. The central character in this novel is an unlikely one: Joseph, introduced to the reader as frail, almost non-descript, a chameleon-like soul hovering on the raw edge of madness. Nothing about Joseph implies "hero," but it is essentially through him that the circle of friends first forms. His doctor has

prescribed walking as a way to burn off his creative (or manic, which is it?) energy and to stop him from exploding into incoherent babbling whenever struck by the reality of life's fragility. Through his walking, Joseph meets the photographer Allen Dent, and poses for a photograph which, when it appears on the cover of Arts Canada, puts him back in touch with teacher-turned-sculptor Mike Trasco. Through Mike, he meets Carlotta, an artist, and Alma, Mike's rich wife. The circle is completed by chance, as such circles often are in life, when Allen "brings home" Roxanne, a lesbian musician, to be a "playmate" for his child-like lover, Pierre. As the "enabling" character in the novel, Joseph is the common link between all the friends: he accepts everyone, is perceptive to his friends' needs, and makes no righteous judgements about anyone. Rule causes all the loose ends of the interwoven skeins of friendship to flow through Joseph. Thus, by the end of the novel's first section, entitled Joseph Walking, Rule has quite naturally introduced us to all members of the novel's "octagonal family."

Ironically, Joseph's walking does not serve its function; on his thirtieth birthday he tips over into madness and is committed to the hospital. Rule handles Joseph's break-down with a restraint which would be somewhat annoying if madness, rather than health, were her essential concern. However, her interest in the novel is to delineate wholeness rather than deficiency, and she makes no attempt to take us inside Joseph's mind during his madness. We see the illness from without, through the eyes of his friends who can only look on with helpless concern. We are left not knowing what happens

inside Joseph's sensitive brain, just as psychiatrists do not wholly understand what mysterious factor enables one person to remain rooted in reality while another strays into insanity. Rule hovers tantalizingly between suggestion and explanation in portraying Joseph's tenuous mental state, as if to imply that we no more understand what makes one man sane and another mad than we do what makes one woman lesbian and another not. If such a connection is made, and one accepts the complexity of both insanity and homosexuality as two of life's inexplicable mysteries whose au fond well-springs will forever remain hidden, may one then infer that society's nervous distaste for both "disorders" stems simply from fear of the unknown?

Joseph is presented as one who is too sensitive, too in tune with his surroundings and too susceptible to the joys of living. Rule implies that happiness, rather than despair, drives him mad:

> The fires, robberies, and accidents which are the urban raw materials for most people's nightmares and TV entertainments did not attract Joseph or disturb in him anything but ordinary fear and sorrow. But a child running, a light-struck cloud, a small pink shell, bloom on a dying dogwood could shock him with a wonder he needed to express or explain. He had to struggle away from speech, swallowing words as he might his gorge, and run, run until he had no breath left. (p. 14)

Joseph's reaction to the beautiful in life is to babble other men's poetry, a kind of talking in literary tongues, as if he does not have his own words for acknowledging what he sees and experiences. It might be said Joseph has an artistic temperament without any art form to practice it upon. Unlike Mike, Joseph's mind seems to be the only "raw material" he can sculpt and shape. Joseph can be regarded as an

excessively-sensitive romantic, who over-reacts to beauty with incoherence and who cares too much about what he sees. He is the antithesis of Carlotta, who is coldly calculating as an artist, and knows what aspects of herself, and of her relationships with others, she must nurture if her artistic ego is to remain strong. An event which would only make others rejoice finally undermines Joseph's sanity:

> The loveliness of Ann's aging and ordinary face, as she told him she was pregnant, finally sent him into the light, and it was Ann who found him, raving at eagle and gull alike, "Greatness is a Way of Life. Art is Immortal. I am the Redeemer King. Death is Bullshit." (p. 53)

Unlike the other characters in Contract with the World, Joseph cherishes the ordinary because he sees it as an amulet against the startling and the bizarre, either of which can over-stimulate him into an inappropriate response. Joseph does not tell his friends about his wholly ordinary life with Ann and her daughters because he fears any intrusion upon that safe and separate part of himself:

> His house, his family were quite ordinary, sunlit, and he must protect what he cherished from the extraordinary as long as he could, even the beauty of it, for it would make no difference to them whether he was sculpted for death by cancer as John had been or driven into the joyful light of madness. (p. 53)

Joseph seems to regard the human body itself as raw material which life will turn into "art," an interesting view since he is not technically an artist himself, unless one counts his typesetting ability. His urge to nurture and protect, however, makes him the connecting point between the other friends and makes them wish to be kind to each other following his hospitalization. It is as if

Joseph's brush with madness has made them all more aware of life's transience. In his odd, chameleon's way, Joseph is akin to what journalist Jane Howard terms the "switchboard" of the loosely-assembled group of friends.[1] He is essential perhaps because of, rather than in spite of, his tentative demeanor. Again surprizing readers out of any tendency to misjudge characters for what they appear to be, rather than what they are, Rule portrays the frail Joseph as a warm and sexually-secure individual.

Three characters within Contract with the World engage in protracted examination of their sexual roles and identity: Mike, Alma and Allen. Of the three, Mike Trasco, belligerent bouncer, almost-sculptor and former teacher, is the most interesting and convincing. In Mike, Rule paints a moving portrait of a traditional man bewildered by the shifting sands of social mores, a man who is honestly confused to find his usual responses no longer appropriate. If painted less compassionately, Mike would be the caricature of the "macho man." However, Rule manages to take the reader beyond Mike's surface to reveal the confused human being inside the blustering body. At first, Mike seems nothing more than an archetypal figure of masculinity:

> Joseph looked up at the vigor of Mike's growing abundance, fiercely pruned and finely shining black [hair]. He had not seemed young even in his student days, his virility so accustomed that there was nothing of the boy left in him. He was the sort of man who would be in his prime for years before he suddenly, unaccountably shrank into age. (p. 13)

Joseph notes the uneasy relationship between Mike and Alma, notes that he is as aggressive in his fatherhood as he is in talking a

tough line about rescuing art from usefulness, and concludes that much of Mike's presentation is sham and noise to cover his own domestic and artistic self-doubts. Ironically, Mike cannot satisfy his wife sexually, while Joseph, whom everyone tends to dismiss, is described by Ann as, "an artist in bed." So much, Rule suggests, for appearances.

Mike's reaction to Alma's affair with Roxanne is what one expects from one so traditionally and aggressively male, but Rule presents Mike's section of the novel, Mike Hanging, with enough insight to make his dilemma both moving and understandable. Certainly, Mike's birthday prank of hanging himself in effigy is childish, but one sees that his relationship with Alma has reached an impasse where such "acting out" is warranted, if not excusable. Mike is indeed hanging. He is in a sort of limbo in which his old responses are outdated and he has not had time to develop a new set. His affair with Carlotta is therapy, allowing him to see what was wrong with his relationship with Alma, and why he can never go back to that, even though it offends his sense of the proper to give up on a situation he so obviously ought to be master of and is so patently not. Part of Mike's problem is that he views his wife and children as an extension of himself, rather than as separate forms of humanity with the right to self-determination. Until his own self-hanging, one suspects Mike Trasco has not been much given to introspection:

> Mike had not known, until after he had hanged himself, that he intended to move out. . . . His message had probably been clearer to Alma than to himself, and even now, two months later, he had

> not defined the ultimatum of his departure and his silence. Aside from sending Alma the money she needed to run the house, he had not contacted her. Oh, he had a hundred accusations to shout, ... But none of them was new. . . . All that women's liberation crap about women insisting on the rights over their own bodies! They'd always had the ultimate power not only over their own but over men's bodies, over life itself. What a stupidly negative, stupidly destructive way to prove it they turned to: flushing unfinished life down the toilet and fucking each other, all the while claiming men are too insensitive, too violent to be a part of the human race! (p. 65)

Rule suggests Mike's vehemence, his absolutist's stance and his resentment stem from his own sense of powerlessness, from his own dissatisfaction with how he runs his own life. Joseph observes that, "Mike, in his attempt to be host, seemed more like a waiter in his own house. The moment he stopped trying to dominate, he didn't know how to do anything but serve." (p. 31) Mike has to learn, and begins to do so by the end of the novel, how to occupy the middle ground between dominance and submission.

Perhaps because he has no delusions of owning Carlotta, or making her conform to his will or his sense of how things ought to be, Mike begins to recognize the feminine (for lack of a better term) aspects of his nature. Since his relationship with Alma was nothing more than an armed truce, Mike never dared to allow himself any tenderness or tears. With Carlotta, he seems to be learning to explore an entirely uncharted territory within himself:

> He covered his face and wept. If her arms hadn't circled his chest, his grief might have broken his ribs. He did not understand what was happening to him, to his life. He could not believe what he, in fact, believed: that Alma wanted no more to do with him. She was so far from his that he was, as

> Carlotta had put it, Alma's cast-off property, and now Carlotta was trying him on for size. . . . Again her arms were around him, holding his shuddering. He was baffled and shamed by his need of that comfort, his passivity, as she finally cradled him like an infant, giving him her breast . . . . (p. 73)

What Carlotta shows Mike, of course, is the tenderness his relationship with Alma has precluded, the natural human need for comfort he has previously refused to acknowledge.

Mike leaves Alma to teach her a lesson, to humble her, to let her know he won't stand for her "nonsense" with Roxanne. What he does not expect is that she will take his leaving at face value, that she will allow him to stay away and that she will not come to him to say she's sorry. Like so many men who really do not feel comfortable with women, or know how to acknowledge them as human beings, Mike seems to have a love-hate relationship with things feminine. He curses women, yet is intrigued by the female:

> Sometimes he imagined driving them [his sons Tony and Victor] down to his mother in Arizona, but she already had her hands full with his brother's kids, and there was the complication of the border. One morning, visiting with Ann, he had a fantasy of moving the boys in there, giving them sisters to teach them the lessons about female nature mothers instinctively withheld from sons. But that was even more a fantasy than getting them across the border and had more to do with Mike's own wish that he'd had a sister, that he'd one day have a daughter, like Susan or Rachel. (p. 75)

Mike reminds us of the male character in Leonard Cohen's poem, "Ballad of the Death of a Lady's Man," who is "trying hard to get/ a woman's education/ but he's not a woman yet."[2] Until Mike can actually admit that Alma has no intention of asking to be forgiven, or of taking him back to her bed, he is held in a sort of limbo.

Only when he admits reality, after his pre-Christmas confrontation with Alma, is he free to take up the strands of his life again, to become the man of action -- and now in a far more real sense -- than he previously pretended to be. As he tells Alma, he is now taking care of himself because he "has no choice." There is no buffer zone of female flesh to protect him, or to serve as scapegoat for his own failures of will or direction. Mike learns what Carlotta and Joseph already know: that one has to recognize one's responsibility for one's self in order either to create or experience life.

However, Rule is wise enough not to let Mike's "rehabilitation" go so far as to tax the reader's credulity. Even success will never completely erase Mike's somewhat redneck attitudes. He will always be the kind of man who will make dishonest bids for sympathy in order to save his own ego, who will describe his wife's preference for other women as a "sickness":

> Part of the sickness is that she doesn't want me around. Actually, she can't stand the sight of me . . . . and I've got the two sons, and I haven't seen them in months. (p. 79)

Mike seems to feel not the least bit sheepish about telling Ann only half the truth about his and Alma's break-up, and doesn't seem to recognize his selective rendering of the situation as the blatant bid for sympathy that it is. He is sensitive enough to appreciate Joseph's fine qualities after the latter's breakdown, and understands what the sensitive man's friendship has meant to him, but he is still insecure enough to react in predictably "macho" fashion to Pierre and Allen, holding them both beneath his contempt:

> In the lineup Mike caught sight of Pierre, three cash registers away, wearing a kerchief over his long dark curls, carrying a woman's handbag. He seemed to be alone. Mike despised Allen, who chose not to be a man, not to be an artist, degraded himself with that embarrassing and pathetic mistake of a boy, with work about which he was entirely cynical, fawning over Alma, condescending to Mike. Pierre was simply pitiful, trying to pass as a little French housewife; he needed a shave. (p. 99)

Mike's reaction to Allen and Pierre's domestic arrangements is that of the "average" outraged citizen: a meld of contempt and disgust slightly tinged with prurient curiosity. Only later, when Mike has been forced totally onto his own resources as he drives alone throughout the U.S. does he begin to develop a little compassion. As he contemplates his brother's divorce years ago, he realizes he may have been unsympathetic. When Jud offers Mike a share in his business, as a means of giving him a focus in his life, Mike "who felt he should have been insulted, was absurdly touched." The old Mike Trasco wouldn't have been, of course; he would have bellowed and blustered and denied the help he so obviously needed, just to prove how strong he was. Mike is learning to stop "hanging" and assume human values. Mike's adjustment in life is one of recognizing his own potential for compassion, rather than the more taxing problem facing Alma and Allen -- coming to grips with a scorned sexual identity.

The section, Alma Writing, is the only one within the novel using the first person pronoun. Rule here seems to come closest to addressing the problems of being a homosexual in an essentially heterosexual world. Using the diary or journal format, Rule has

Alma confront the truth about her emerging sexual identity. Such a device can be effective because it functions as "thinking aloud," allowing the character in question to engage in debate and self-excoriation while thrashing his or her way through the dilemmas life presents. However, as revealing as it may be of Alma's prejudices and inconsistencies -- thereby hinting of the prejudices and inconsistencies of the comfortably upper-middle class society she represents -- Alma Writing is one of the more boring and least convincing segments of the novel.

Part of the problem is that Alma Writing, with its flatly confessional style, suffers from (on a lesser scale) the same problem as This Is Not For You. Being inside Alma's head as she reiterates her doubts and fears about loving Roxanne becomes tedious after a time, and one tires of Alma's self-indulgences. It is interesting to note that in Alma Writing, Rule refers to Sita, Kate Millett's navel-level view of the demise of a lesbian relationship, and leads us to understand that this form of art is what Alma has in mind when she begins her half-hearted journal.

Despite its flaws, Alma Writing offers us Rule at her most introspective as we follow Alma through her own private mental "coming out." In this section, Rule more directly confronts the homosexual dilemma than she does anywhere else in her novels, with the exception of The Desert of the Heart. In the character of Alma, we find many of the concerns -- particularly those of guilt and shame -- plaguing the homosexual attempting to live without encountering the censure of a homophobic society. At the outset of

her journal, Alma admits to being "so guilty in every direction that I can't understand anything." (p. 124) She admits to herself that she married Mike for protection, as a means of preventing herself from discovering anything about her true sexuality:

> I was safe. Mike did protect me, and he would have gone on even without the children he still wanted, and I would have gone on, yes, even after Roxanne (she might even have made it easier), if I hadn't finally really seen his pain, not hanging there in the shed but on Joseph's face, in Joseph's simple, humiliating words, "He's unhappy." (p. 127)

However, admitting she wants and needs the protection of all a husband symbolizes does not make it any easier for Alma to shed her impulse to run back to that kind of protection. Alma, like Allen, wants to "pass" and is thus controlled by the homophobic ethic even while discovering her own homophile nature.

In Alma, Rule also explores a topic seldom recognized in modern fiction: the shame and misunderstanding women often have of their own bodies. Roxanne recognizes that emotion in Alma and cannot comprehend it, since she revels in female beauty. Alma thinks of her physical self with contempt:

> Looking like a million dollars was all I'd ever tried to do. Something that expensive would have to be all right. The only time I'd ever had any confidence in the body underneath was when I was pregnant and when I was nursing a baby.

Through Alma's musings, Rule also explores another topic which has recently concerned other feminist writers -- the masculinity of the language of love and the way women have been conditioned to view and describe their bodies in male terms and from a male viewpoint. May Sarton comments on a similar concern in Mrs. Stevens hears the

mermaids singing, when she observes:

> Why is it that women writers cannot deal with sex and get away with it? . . . the language of sex is masculine. Women would have to invent a new language.[3]

Alma, who recoils at Mike's crude language, ponders the problem of sexual semantics:

> The problem is that I have no language at all for my body or Roxanne's body that isn't either derisive or embarrassing. . . . We make love without nouns as much as possible, speak directions instead. "There." "Here?" "Yes, there." Adequate for the lovely circumstance of two very present and visible bodies which are wonderfully familiar in fact as well as practice, but a love letter filled with nothing but adverbs is ridiculous. Gertrude Stein tried to invent a new language for lovemaking, but it was more a code to be cracked than a language of communication. Imagine the limitation of that when scholars are still debating whether "cow" means turd or orgasm. (p. 131)

Anyone familiar with Rule's non-fiction work will here recognize the hand of the author putting words in Alma's mouth. One wonders if Rule has made Roxanne an artist with sound rather than words to express a dissatisfaction with a sexist language. In love-making, Alma observes, "Roxanne doesn't need a language" because she uses noises instead, an occurrence which cannot help reminding us of our basic similarity to all other warm-blooded animals when engaging in the sex act in a purely unself-conscious fashion.

Aside from shedding her need to "pass," Alma must somehow convey her newly recognized sexual identity to children and family, certainly a horrendously complex and sensitive issue facing any emerging homophile. Alma's mother describes Roxanne as a "funny little thing," and tells her she should "have her over more often" only because she doesn't know the nature of the two women's

friendship. The older woman's true feelings about homosexuality are more accurately revealed in her description of Allen as "that unfortunate man." The lecture she gives Alma after the latter has discussed Pierre and Allen's relationship in front of Tony and Victor is vintage homophobe:

> Do I not care, as Mother later in private suggested to me, whether the boys grow up straight? The little sermon I preached to her was pure self-defense, and I was even nervous that she'd wonder why I'd gone into the matter so thoroughly as to know the date the American Psychiatric Association voted homosexuality out of the sick and into the personality trait category. But she was too caught up with the argument.
> "Then it's a bad personality trait," she said.
> "I think being able to love anybody is a step in the right direction."
> Well, I do, but if Tony grew up to be a gay militant, I'd feel like the original castrating mother, and Mike would kill him. Still, I know it isn't something mothers do to sons, fathers to daughters.
> I love Roxanne like a blade of grass breaking concrete to get to the light. And if Tony had to love like that, couldn't I have the courage to be glad? I haven't even the courage to face all I'm breaking. I pretend it's not going on, as if all these months were a long holiday from a self I'll go back to in a house I take care of with Mike banging in and out. Yet every time I'm with Roxanne, I know I'm already leading the life I say is impossible. The more I protest to myself that I can't live with her, the more determined I am to risk everything, even my sons, and that terrifies me. (p. 134)

Here Rule also effectively portrays the double bind faced by even the best-adjusted and well-intentioned of homosexuals -- the conflict between the intellectual knowledge that they are not sick and the emotional awareness that most of society does not accept them and does regard them as aberrant. The result of such conflict is a duality between the mind, which has rationalized homosexual proclivities as acceptable, and the emotions, which have internalized society's negative view of such practices. That Rule is describing

authentic dilemmas is corroborated by Jane Howard's Families. Howard asks a woman named Eileen, who shares a happy relationship with another lesbian, if she wants her daughter to be a homosexual. Eileen replies, "I pray she won't be left-handed and I pray she won't be queer."[4] Rule herself may maintain that there is no difference whether one chooses "one's left hand or one's right" in loving, but clearly many lesbians do not share her confidence.[5]

Alma's vacillation is agonizing and her dichotomy about her sexual affinity is extreme. She veers from purple-tinged prose praising Roxanne's beauty:

> She is like a shell, so fragile and intricately interior, sounding and tasting of the sea. I understand why the clitoris is called a pearl, hidden in oystery frills. I am inside her one of the instruments of her song; also she is the instrument I play . . . . (p. 132)

to flat-footed, self-loathing which attempts to repudiate what she is:

> I don't want to be looked at and called a "unfortunate woman," having to work, living with another woman. Being a lesbian is a great place to visit, but I wouldn't want to live there. (p. 152)

Alma is honest with herself; she does admit that she fears living with Roxanne because of what she herself thinks as much as she fears what others think. Her attempt at writing, however, reveals how superficial is her acceptance of her self-acceptance: she tells her own and Roxanne's stories in the pieces she writes, but she changes genders of her protagonists to make them more acceptable and "normal" to the potential reader. Clearly, it is too soon for Alma to attempt to write about homosexual situations; she is too uncomfortable with them in real life to recreate them in fiction.

The reader suspects Rule of using Alma to express her own views, in several other sections of Alma Writing, as the following excerpts suggest:

> There must be a lot more women like me than like them [types like Kate Millet and Violet Leduc] for whom loving another woman is nothing but that, with no redeeming politics or transforming art. (p. 154)

> I wonder if most women who love each other don't live together? . . . Why is illicit sex always a man on his lunch hour or on a business trip? Or a woman with the Fuller brush man? There are jokes about steam baths and public toilets as well, but there's never an arched eyebrow about bridge games or meetings of Brownie leaders. Even with the women's movement characterized as a bunch of bra-burning dykes, people still don't believe women have sex with women except when they can't get men or are man haters. (p. 162)

> It is peculiar to go anywhere with Roxanne. No matter how much people gossip about our sex life, they don't treat us as a couple. A man and a woman don't have to live together to be paired. At their slightest indication, they are treated like Siamese Twins. (p. 163)

Rule here points out society's definite "man-on-woman" bias, which must eventually influence how a lesbian feels about herself, and must affect how she views her position within society.

In the final analysis, although we see enough of Alma's dilemma to empathize with her, we cannot like the woman. She is at base too selfish, too concerned with self-protection to remain a sympathetic character. Although one can understand her impulse to protect her children, her decision to ostracize Allen following the pederasts' scandal and Pierre's suicide is unconscionable, as is her move to prevent Allen's show from opening in Vancouver. But it is a tribute to Rule's skill that, although we do not like Alma, we regard her with unease, all the while asking ourselves, 'in her shoes, would

I behave any more admirably?'

As the novel progresses beyond Alma's section to those belonging nominally to Roxanne, Allen and Carlotta, the characters become more interwoven and their lives become more fused. Rule thus illustrates the interdependency of the circle of friends and suggests the "connectedness" of the human race. We often learn more about individuals from their friends than we do from them themselves, a situation Contract with the World reflects. For instance, Roxanne's clear-sighted view of Alma helps the reader to better understand the latter's foibles. Because she is so free of guilt about her own sexuality, Roxanne's observations about her lover give Rule further opportunity to address the problems of being a homosexual in a society skeptical of the validity of such affiliations. Roxanne observes of Alma that:

> She had never known anyone as generous with her body and as selfish with everything else. . . . It was not conscious. For Roxanne it was oddly admirable because so uncalculating. Allen, who worked hard to maintain cynical superiority and was fond of making common cause with Alma, was guiltily generous in ways Roxanne understood. Alma's guilt was never connected with her selfishness. She wanted to be punished -- even brutally punished -- for the generosity of her body. That was what Roxanne couldn't stand, Alma's wanting pain as if it were something she had earned, something Roxanne owed her as an emotional debt. It was heartbreaking. It was ridiculous. Roxanne didn't understand it. She wouldn't do it. (p. 185)

Like Kate George, Alma feels her sexual needs are a form of "damnation" and thus she wants to be punished for her "sins." Alma's need for self-punishment finds no echo in Roxanne, who regards the human body with "perpetually renewing wonder that [is] joyful and holy." Roxanne's own desires, as expressed to Pierre in

one of their heart-to-heart talks, are simple enough: "I'd rather not lie, and I'd like to be happy." However, Roxanne also sees Alma for what she is, a woman who has always been protected from society and who is "so safe she doesn't know what's dangerous."

Roxanne understands Joseph better than everyone except Pierre. She understands because she has never been totally safe, has no illusion of "salvation," and knows how fragile is the illusion of security, how slight the chance of "salvation":

> The matter with Joseph, Roxanne and Pierre had long ago decided, was that he knew and pretended he didn't. He knew everyone was dying of cancer, and he knew there was a point to being careful and loving. He couldn't stand to know. Now mostly he didn't have to pretend because he did forget, really forget, but forgetting wasn't the same as not knowing, like Allen and Alma. Only real ignorance could make you strong. Joseph lacked that. (p. 195)

Pierre lacks that blissful ignorance too, despite Allen's attempts to protect him and save him from the reality of the world outside his house of shelter. Ironically, it is finally Allen who destroys Pierre by showing himself to be vulnerable to the judgments and dictums of that world, by letting the "damnation" of scandal touch him. When Allen is involved in the arrest of pederasts, one surmises that Pierre sees his armour against the world crumbling. But one can only surmise. Here, as with Joseph's tilt into madness, Rule is not definite. She gives readers the same torment of doubt endured by a suicide's loved ones. Society's moral surveillance intrudes upon Contract with the World's homosexual characters in other ways, bringing the world's opinion of lesbians painfully home to Alma.

When Victor calls his mother a "girl-fucker," Alma hits her son "hard in the face" because she is ashamed and afraid of, as Roxanne puts it, "what the world teaches him." Roxanne's reaction is the opposite: she is not ashamed and wants to explain their relationship to the two boys:

> She wanted to say, "The right word is lesbian, but most people still think that's as bad as girl-fucker. All either of them means is that your mother and I love each other and that's a good thing." Then she could have told him how to apologize in a way that he could understand. But Victor was not Roxanne's child, and Roxanne's feelings were very different from Alma's. Roxanne was often frightened; she was never ashamed. (p. 206)

This scene is yet another illustration of how the outside world intrudes upon the homosexual's life. Society's thoughtless epithets are even more painful when hurled by a loved one, particularly a child whom one wants to protect from unpopular truths. Ironically, Alma's efforts at protection are futile, and spare her sons nothing. Tony confesses to Carlotta that he knows why Alma won't speak to Allen: "Because she thinks I'm a queer." (p. 323)

In the relationships between Pierre and Allen, and Alma and Roxanne, Rule explores the problem of roles, which she implies are just as difficult for homosexual couples to solve as they are for heterosexuals. Pierre and Allen have what might be called a traditional relationship: Pierre stays home to keep house while Allen daily braves the working world; Pierre is dependent and "feminine" while Allen is dominant and masculine. For Alma and Roxanne, the divisions are not nearly so clean-cut. At first Alma stays home, toying with her writing while Roxanne works. Then Roxanne spends most of her spare time on her sound map while Alma works. Rule

paints neither the gay nor the lesbian pairing as flawless, but again, as in her earlier novels, she depicts the hope of love as one of life's few salvations. She still makes no attempt to explain the mysterious "why" people love each other:

> A thing begins for any number of reasons, from the way a nipple tugs at a blouse to on whose lap you happen to be sitting on the way home; a thing goes on for only one reason: love. Roxanne was as sure Alma loved her as she was that she loved Alma. Roxanne would stay through times of jealousy, times of being unable to work, times of long and stupid misunderstandings as long as she loved and was loved, which was the hope of happiness. (p. 213)

Roxanne's gnawing fear that the security of love is only fleeting and that the world can always break in upon it takes on an awful reality when the newspaper headline, "Pederasts' Party Over," causes a Toronto incident to wreak havoc in Vancouver:

> Roxanne read it all twice, then three times. Something like that couldn't happen to Allen -- to Pierre, to herself, sure, they were never really safe, but Allen was the man who bailed you out because he knew all the rules, had the money, and never made silly mistakes. (p. 229)

Allen has been the talisman to everyone else: he has found "salvation"; he is the one who could "pass" and who could mingle in the heterosexual world in relative safety. If he is no longer safe, none of them can be. That is what frightens Alma, what makes her insist that she and Roxanne must never see Allen again. And, presumably, the knowledge that Allen can no longer protect him from the ugliness of the outside world causes Pierre to kill himself.

Rule's presentation of Allen's reaction to Pierre's death does not foster sympathy for the homosexual's position in society. We agree Allen has a right to his grief. But does he also have a right

to revenge, to force others into a public "coming out" just because he himself was caught at a compromising gathering? Allen's first reaction to news of Pierre's death is disbelief, then embarrassment because suicide is "like something you'd see in London at a matinee with your aunt." (p. 241) Finally, Allen fixes upon anger as the emotion most useful to him:

> Sinking down gradually through layers of shock, guilt, and grief, at bottom what Allen stood on was anger, an emotion far too expensive and dangerous for him ever to have reached it before. But now he was alone. If he made a mistake, he could damage only himself. At first it was like a huge machine, far too heavy and violent for Allen to master as a weapon against anyone but himself. Every muscle in his body ached, and he tried to hold himself in his own arms, whimpering for comfort. Before he could more than catch his breath, it was his anger he was embracing, and the whimper turned to a roar -- at Pierre for leaving him, at himself for his cosmic carelessness for his own and Pierre's safety, at the world determined to teach them to kill themselves, the humane and inexpensive alternative to castration or capital punishment. (p. 246)

Allen, we see, has kept both his anger and his hostility at the homophobic world under check because he wanted to keep his life safe and secure for Pierre. Now that his lover has gone, he no longer needs to be a cool cynic. Allen decides that:

> He was going to have revenge, of what sort he didn't yet know. He only understood that at the deepest level he rejected Pierre's death as punishment. Pierre had to be seen as a martyr in a war that had been going on for centuries because only one side admitted to fighting. (p. 246)

Certainly, Allen is right to refuse to view Pierre's death as a price paid for his homosexual sins, and his perception of the unspoken war between the hetero- and homosexual worlds is accurate. But the reader must ask if revenge is ultimately any more honorable a

solution than cool cynicism or attempting to "pass" the scrutiny of those one mistrusts? Allen's pose with the gun, his desire to kill someone, given the sort of man he is, is ultimately unconvincing. The gun, of course, functions as both phallic symbol and metaphor for the tyranny of machismo. Which finally killed Pierre? The gun/penis in the mouth or the macho ethic which dictates rigid rules for what men should be and how they must act? Either answer is too simplistic and, at bottom, too maudlin. Carlotta is clear on that. She tells Allen, "metaphors don't kill people. That gun killed Pierre." And even Allen must admit that when all is said and done, "Pierre killed himself." (p. 252) As he works himself through his acceptance of Pierre's death, Allen must accept some truths about himself. And when the police question him about a boy's murder, he realizes he is no longer invisible and can no longer "pass."

> Allen liked to believe, because he wanted Pierre to believe, that it was a matter of good taste rather than cowardice that kept Allen from being publicly homosexual. There was something not quite nice, jock vulgar, about the political kisses men gave each other on the covers of radical magazines, and no wonder people were offended. For years, Allen had, in fact, been behaving like a common criminal, and he had finally, briefly, been treated like one. He had no more faced the implications than Alma had the night he took her to the jail to bail Roxanne out. It was just beginning to occur to Allen not only that people like Pierre and Roxanne were vulnerable and therefore in need of protection but that he, Allen Dent, could be deprived of his livelihood, locked up. (p. 255)

With that awareness comes Allen's decision to take a political stance, to declare himself and to outline the persecution he has undergone. Ironically, once he takes a stance, and decides to declare himself, he finds no market for his views. Allen's final

decision to reveal his sexual identity does not come to him easily. He has to be goaded into it by Roxanne, who has seen all along that none of them are ever "safe" as long as they are alive:

> "There's something I want to say . . . . You can be superior to Pierre and me, that's fine, but you can't be superior to yourself. You're as much a cock-sucker as anyone in the want ads. You're as much a fairy and as much a victim. If even Pierre's killing himself isn't enough to jar you loose, maybe nothing is."
> "Loose from what?"
> "Your worship of the straight world. Your hatred of your own."
> "It's not a world. It's a street scene."

Roxanne is correct. In a different way, Allen feels as uncomfortable admitting his own homosexuality as Alma does. He has always held himself above the holus-bolus homosexuals around him, has always felt superior. But he too, for all his culture and discretion, can be labelled as "pervert" by a society he has always avoided offending. Allen's biggest surprise comes in having his story turned down by the editorial staff of a gay magazine because, "we bully the shit out of people to come out, but we don't witch hunt our own." Allen's idea of naming names is quite rightly rejected for the revenge that it is, but Rule's depiction of homosexuals' own protectionism brings up uncomfortable questions about how integrated the gay and straight worlds really can ever be, despite more liberal attitudes.

Given Rule's views on the necessity of separating the polemical and the artistic, one can only assume that her depiction of Allen presents a negative image of how an artist ought to be motivated, and a negative view of what "political" acts ought to entail. Had Allen admitted his true affinity all along, Rule seems to suggest,

he would not now need to turn his art into revenge. However, at the same time, she is skillful enough in her portrayal of the photographer to make us stop and wonder, as we did with Alma, if we would have been any more honest ourselves.

In Contract with the World, more than with any of her other novels, Rule takes care to sketch homosexuals as a disparate group of separate individuals, often sharing differing opinions on the issues that affect them directly. Roxanne, for instance, disagrees with Allen's method of "coming out." Although she probably would not have had Allen's show closed in Vancouver as Alma did, Roxanne supports Alma's move. She views Allen's show as "betraying your own people" and wonders where he gets "the crust to be so sure you can get even and have the right to [do so]." Roxanne makes it quite clear that Allen's decision to take his retrospective of unspoken homosexuals across the country to major galleries is "a terrible thing." Allen in turn, thinks Roxanne has neglected her work in favor of being Alma's live-in slave and lover, and the two part as much in sorrow as in anger.

Despite its ruminations on the place and function of art in society, the last segment of Contract with the World is distinctly disappointing, even though it does manage to re-unite the octagon of friends in, of all places, a paddy wagon. One is not sure what Rule is attempting to say in these final passages. That the friends are survivors, undiminished even though Carlotta's portraits of them have been ruined by red paint hurled by rednecks? That the friendships will change but continue to endure? That there will

always be rednecks who won't understand those different than themselves, but that the different ones will survive? Interestingly enough, Rule has been building to a climax at this point in the novel. What is likely to surprize is the unsatisfactory format the resolution takes. After the serious moral dilemmas raised, after the pointed criticisms of the schism between heterosexual and homosexual viewpoints, such a simplistic denouement is almost offensive. One wants, what? something more definitive to solve the conflict introduced at the novel's end. Perhaps one wants, in this case, even something prescriptive. More is certainly required than a mere comedic gesture.

CONCLUSION

Close consideration of Jane Rule's five novels leads one to conclude that the author is a latter-day humanist whose concern is to limn the multifarious arrangements possible when human beings reach out to each other in search of love, rather than to prescribe ways by which they ought to do so. Rule maintains her narrative terrain is what is, rather than what ought to be. However, that self-assessment is not entirely true since, by the very nature of her humanism, Rule often creates characters who, while not perfect, approach certain ideals of "good humanity." One thinks of Amelia, of Ruth, and of Joseph in this context; all three tender the gift of loving to those around them. In Rule's fiction, that gift knows no conventional bounds, obeys no stereotypes and often offends accepted morality. Nevertheless, Rule's prose is basically descriptive, as opposed to prescriptive, and she cannot by any stretch of an epithet be termed either didactic or polemic in her writing.

Although Rule began her career as a novelist in 1964 with a focused exploration of lesbian passion and commitment, she has, with the publication of her fifth novel in 1980, widened her themes to include depictions of both heterosexual and homosexual love, as well as durable platonic friendships. Her novels are infused with warmly undifferentiated approval for the human impulse to reach out and make contact with others. Failure, to Rule, is the renunciation or falsification of this impulse, the replacement of honest emotion with inauthentic or self-protective responses.

Rule's strengths as a novelist are the sincerity that infuses her novels, her understated sense of humor and her ability to create compelling characters. Her weaknesses are a reluctance to grapple with dramatic tension in her work and an apparent refusal to go beyond a certain superficial level of observation in depicting her characters' motivations. One may observe that Rule herself has indirectly refuted both criticisms by indicating different intentions as a novelist, but these failures on her part lead to obvious weaknesses in her work, particularly in Contract with the World and This Is Not For You. In her often-cited interview with Geoff Hancock, Rule herself admits that, "action in my work isn't really the significant part of it . . . . I don't think about dramatic moments very much,"[1] and earlier confesses that she doesn't "have much respect for psychology."[2] Rule's explanation for the latter, rather startling statement is that psychology has "done far too much damage for me to feel any kind of patience with it." One assumes the damage she refers to is the discipline's tendency (until just recently) to "try to cure what is not an illness in the first place."[3]

Rule's distaste for psychology, rather than any intellectual dishonesty on her part, may be the explanation for her difficulty clarifying the motivation of characters like Kate George, but it does not ease the reader's task in understanding Kate and Esther's impasse. A refusal to explain the origin of love is consistent with Rule's private and novelistic philosophy that one falls in love with an individual, rather than a person of a specific sex. Perhaps Rule's

reluctance to rationalize or intellectualize sexual orientation stems from the same basic abhorrence she seems to exhibit for didacticism. She has termed morality an "invented structure for conserving and communicating order . . . a test of our conformity rather than our integrity."[4] Thus, one might argue that Rule's aversion to prescriptive morality and her interest in unique human relationships are an expected out-growth of her world view.

It also follows that an apolitical stance, rather than a didactic or proselytizing one, is predictable -- even desirable in terms of consistency -- in Rule's work. "I'm not what most people would consider political," Rule confesses.[5] Later in the same interview she explains why this is so:

> I don't really believe a moral value is a shared thing in the sense that you can teach it or preach it. I think you can communicate qualities and values that you yourself perceive. But whether or not someone else takes those is not my business.[6]

Such a view is far more likely to result in descriptive, non-didactic prose than it is in proselytizing. However, there is an undeniable truth to George Orwell's observation that, "the opinion that art should have nothing to do with politics is itself a political attitude." In other words, by not taking a didactic stance on lesbianism in her novels, it could be argued that, by default, Rule has taken a position nonetheless. That is certainly the tack her radical lesbian detractors might take when claiming that her novels harm the homosexual "cause" by being neither political nor prescriptive.

In her five novels Rule has progressed from consideration of isolated relationships between two people to broader systems of shared experience between groups of individuals attempting to live in harmonious community. She has not limited herself to consideration of solely lesbian alliances, nor has she "ghettoized" the homosexual experience. Indeed, she has done the opposite, attempting to depict as "normal" the homophile attraction by integrating it within the heterosexual community. However, when one speculates as to future novels by Rule, and future directions for her fiction, one cannot envision continued avoidance of a political stance without entertaining great fear for the integrity of her work. At some point in her career as a novel writer, one feels that Rule's inherent sincerity and her instinctive honesty will force her into a more detailed consideration of the inescapable polarities between the homo- and the hetero-sexual world. If Rule indeed is to continue writing about what is, she will have to address herself to answering the questions about sexual motivation and identity raised by such novels as Contract with the World.

The publication this spring of Outlander, a collection of short stories and essays, indicates that Rule is already on the way to assuming a political stance, at least within a limited circle of readers. Outlander, although provocative and extremely revealing in a way her interviews with the "straight" press are not, is almost impossible to find in popular bookstores. It is published by a Tallahassie lesbian/feminist house, Naiad Press, for a lesbian audience. In Outlander, which by its very existence makes a certain

political statement, Rule still reiterates her distaste for propaganda:

> A good writer is not in the business of propaganda because the nature of art is not to generalize but to reach the universal by way of the particular.[7]

She also writes of understanding the gay community's need "for art which can celebrate," but sees clearly that such a desire "gets translated into a need for narrowly correct propaganda for one lifestyle or another."[8] Twenty-seven years of novel-writing has not changed Rule's determination to reflect reality in her fiction:

> I am trying to write about the real world in which people are often influenced by the silliest of moral teachings, for which I am more interested in understanding than judging them . . . . My responsibility, as I see it, is not to present the world as it ought to be but as it is.[9]

One must admire Rule for the insight to recognize that those with whom she has the most affinity may object to her work because it does not consistently portray them in a flattering light, or because it is not clearly political in exhorting readers to adopt a gay or lesbian lifestyle, and the courage to remain true to her own vision of the world. Rule is doubly beseiged: she also faces criticism from heterosexuals who object to "happy" novels about lesbians. In an impassioned passage in Outlander, Rule makes her artistic stance clear:

> I will not apologize for us [homosexuals], nor will I dress us up as the silverware ads of the 80s. I will not even give us exclusive attention. I will bring to us, as I do to each of my characters, all the tenderness, severity, and humor I can command to show us making our various contracts with the world.

Rule cannot be faulted for an integrity which recognizes detractors in both the homosexual and heterosexual camps but refuses to compromise itself in either direction.

However, the task left to Rule in her future novels seems clear: she must find some means of delineating the tenuous political position the homosexual occupies in a heterosexual society while avoiding prose that is either stridently didactic or blatantly propagandistic. In her five novels to date, Rule appears to have been avoiding overtly political statements out of fear of falling into the pit of polemics. One would like to see her shed such a handicap and do with her fiction what Evelyn determines to do with her life in The Desert of the Heart: fully embrace "for its own sake the grotesque miracle of love."

NOTES

Chapter I

[1]Jane Rule, Lesbian Images (New York: Doubleday, 1975), p. 5.

[2]Rule, Images, p. 48.

[3]Geoff Hancock, "An Interview with Jane Rule," Canadian Fiction Magazine, No. 23 (August 1954), p. 103.

[4]Rule, Images, p. 62.

[5]Rule, Images, p. 62.

[6]Hancock, p. 85.

[7]Alan Twigg, Ed., For Openers: Conversations with 24 Canadian Authors (Madiera Park, B.C.: Harbour Publishing, 1981), p. 24.

[8]Rule, Images, p. 4.

[9]Twigg, p. 24.

[10]Hancock, p. 89.

[11]Hancock, p. 90.

[12]K.A. Hamilton, Ed., Canada Writes! (Toronto: The Writers' Union of Canada, 1977), p. 299.

[13]Karla Jay and Allen Young, The Gay Report (New York: Summit Books, 1977), p. 2.

[14]Hancock, p. 89.

[15]Sidney Abbott and Barbara Love, Sappho Was A Right-On Woman (New York: Stein and Day, 1972), p. 102.

[16]Bettie Wysor, The Lesbian Myth (New York: Random House, 1974), p. 191-92.

[17]Radclyffe Hall, The Well of Loneliness (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1928), commentary, unpaginated.

[18]Djuna Barnes, Nightwood (London: Faber and Faber, 1936), p. 2.

[19]Hancock, p. 107.

[20]Jill Johnston, Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), p. 167.

[21]Twigg, p. 25.

[22]Johnston, p. 166.

[23]Johnston, p. 179.

[24]Rule, Images, p. 5.

[25]Rule, Images, p. 47.

[26]Gertrude Stein, The Making of Americans (New York: Something Else Press, 1966), p. 606.

[27]May Sarton, Mrs. Stevens hears the mermaids singing (New York: W.W. Norton, 1965), p. 25.

[28]Rule, Images, p. 173.

[29]Rule, Images, p. 8.

[30]John Hofsess, "Calumnity Jane," Books In Canada, Oct. 1976, p. 5.

Chapter II

[1]Colette, The Pure and the Impure (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1966), p. 109.

[2]Hancock, p. 108.

[3]Twigg, p. 28.

[4]Christopher Lausch, The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in An Age of Diminishing Expectations (New York: Warner Books, 1979), p. 76.

[5]Hancock, p. 95.

[6]Twigg, p. 24.

[7]Johnston, p. 167.

[8]Thomas Bullfinch, Bullfinch's Mythology: The Age of Fable (New York: New American Library, 1962), p. 135.

[9]Hancock, p. 92.

[10]Hancock, p. 87.

[11]Hancock, p. 89.

[12]Hancock, p. 100.

[13]Hancock, p. 96.

[14]Hancock, p. 99.

[15]Hancock, p. 98.

Chapter III

[1]Hancock, p. 100.

[2]Hancock, p. 100.

[3]Hancock, p. 101.

[4]Hancock, p. 96.

[5]Hancock, p. 96.

[6]Hancock, p. 104.

[7]Hancock, p. 104.

[8]K.J. Dover, Greek Homosexuality (London: Duckworth and Co., 1978), p. 1.

[9]Bullfinch, p. 65.

[10]Wysor, p. 190.

[11]The Bible (Oxford: Oxford University Press, for the British and Foreign Bible Society, No date), p. 243.

[12]Wysor, p. 49.

[13]Hancock, p. 91.

Chapter IV

[1]Jane Howard, Families (New York: Berkley Publishing, 1980), p. 44.

[2]Garry Geddes and Phyllis Bruce, Eds., 15 Canadian Poets Plus 5 (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 144.

[3]Sarton, Mrs. Stevens, p. 157.

[4]Howard, p. 230.

Conclusion

[1]Hancock, p. 84.

[2]Hancock, p. 65.

[3]Rule, Images, p. 31.

[4]Rule, Images, p. 12.

[5]Hancock, p. 65.

[6]Hancock, p. 85.

[7]Jane Rule, "Sexuality in Literature," Outlander (Tallahassie: Naiad Press, 1981), p. 185.

[8]Rule, "Reflections," Outlander, p. 203.

[9]Rule, "Sexuality in Literature," Outlander, p. 153.

[10]Rule, "Reflections," p. 204.

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